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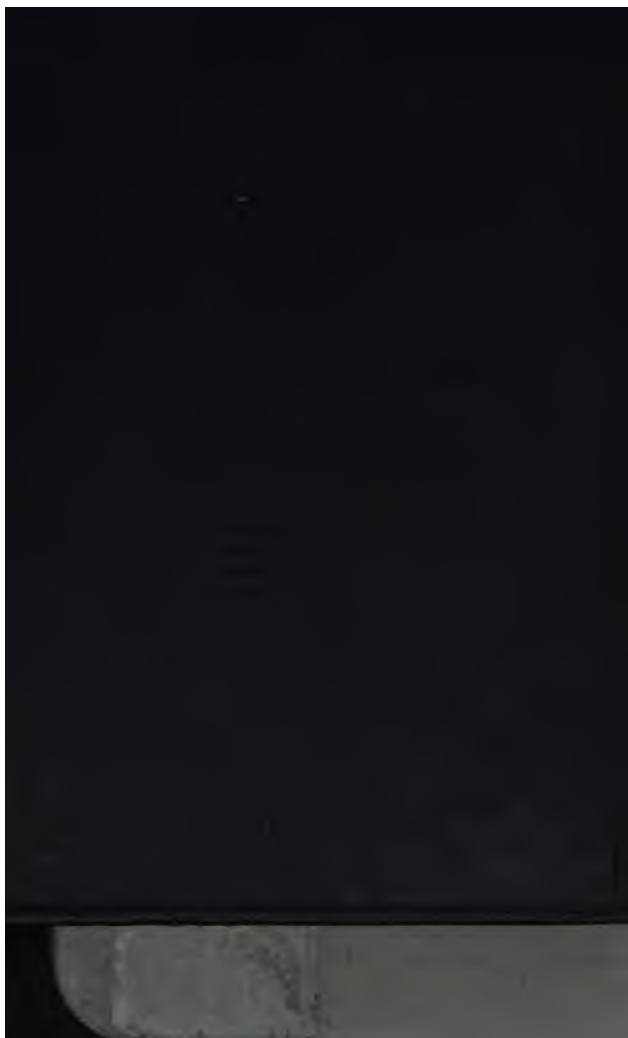
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AND

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BY

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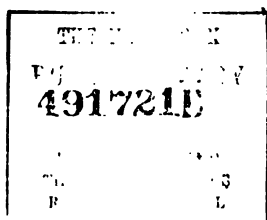


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AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE
EDINBURGH EDITION.

THESE little stories were written about the village people of New England. They are studies of the descendants of the Massachusetts Bay colonists, in whom can still be seen traces of those features of will and conscience, so strong as to be almost exaggerations and deformities, which characterised their ancestors.

These traces are, however, more evident among the older people ; among the younger, they are dimmer and more modified. It therefore seems better worth the while to try to preserve in literature still more of this old and probably disappearing type of New England character, although it has been done with the best results by other American authors.

I hope these studies of the serious and

self-restrained New England villagers may perhaps give the people of Old England a kindly interest in them, and I have accepted with pleasure the proposal of Mr. Douglas to include *A Far-Away Melody* in his "Series of American Authors."

M. E. W.

Dec. 5th, 1889.

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A FAR-AWAY MELODY.



A FAR-AWAY MELODY.

THE clothes-line was wound securely around the trunks of four gnarled, crooked old apple-trees, which stood promiscuously about the yard back of the cottage. It was tree-blossoming time, but these were too aged and sapless to blossom freely, and there was only a white bough here and there shaking itself triumphantly from among the rest, which had only their new green leaves. There was a branch occasionally which had not even these, but pierced the tender green and the flossy white in hard, grey nakedness. All over the yard, the grass was young and green and short, and had not yet gotten any feathery heads. Once in a while there was a dandelion set closely down among it.

The cottage was low, of a dark-red colour, with white facings around the windows, which had no blinds, only green paper curtains.

The back door was in the centre of the

house, and opened directly into the green yard, with hardly a pretence of a step, only a flat oval stone before it.

Through this door, stepping cautiously on the stone, came presently two tall, lank women in chocolate-coloured calico gowns, with a basket of clothes between them. They set the basket underneath the line on the grass, with a little clothes-pin bag beside it, and then proceeded methodically to hang out the clothes. Everything of a kind went together, and the best things on the outside line, which could be seen from the street in front of the cottage.

The two women were curiously alike. They were about the same height, and moved in the same way. Even their faces were so similar in feature and expression that it might have been a difficult matter to distinguish between them. All the difference, and that would have been scarcely apparent to an ordinary observer, was a difference of degree, if it might be so expressed. In one face the features were both bolder and sharper in outline, the eyes were a trifle larger and brighter, and the whole expression more animated and decided than in the other.

One woman's scanty drab hair was a shade

darker than the other's, and the negative fairness of complexion, which generally accompanies drab hair, was in one relieved by a slight tinge of warm red on the cheeks.

This slightly intensified woman had been commonly considered the more attractive of the two, although in reality there was very little to choose between the personal appearance of these twin sisters, Priscilla and Mary Brown. They moved about the clothes-line, pinning the sweet white linen on securely, their thick, white-stockinged ankles showing beneath their limp calicoes as they stepped, and their large feet in cloth slippers flattening down the short, green grass. Their sleeves were rolled up, displaying their long, thin, muscular arms, which were sharply pointed at the elbows.

They were homely women ; they were fifty and over now, but they never could have been pretty in their 'teens, their features were too irredeemably irregular for that. No youthful freshness of complexion or expression could have possibly done away with the impression that they gave. Their plainness had probably only been enhanced by the contrast, and these women, to people generally, seemed better-looking than when they were young. There was an honesty

and patience in both faces that showed all the plainer for their homeliness.

One, the sister with the darker hair, moved a little quicker than the other, and lifted the wet clothes from the basket to the line more frequently. She was the first to speak, too, after they had been hanging out the clothes for some little time in silence. She stopped as she did so, with a wet pillow-case in her hand, and looked up reflectively at the flowering apple-boughs overhead, and the blue sky showing between, while the sweet spring wind ruffled her scanty hair a little.

"I wonder, Mary," said she, "if it would seem so very queer to die a mornin' like this, say. Don't you believe there's apple branches a-hangin' over them walls made out of precious stones, like these, only there ain't any dead limbs among 'em, an' they're all covered thick with flowers? An' I wonder if it would seem such an awful change to go from this air into the air of the New Jerusalem." Just then a robin hidden somewhere in the trees began to sing. "Is'pose," she went on, "that there's angels instead of robins, though, and they don't roost up in trees to sing, but stand on the ground, with lilies growin' round their feet, may be, up to their knees, or on the gold stones in the

street, an' play on their harps to go with the singin'."

The other sister gave a scared, awed look at her. "Lor, don't talk that way, sister," said she. "What has got into you lately? You make me crawl all over, talkin' so much about dyin'. You feel well, don't you?"

"Lor, yes," replied the other, laughing, and picking up a clothes-pin for her pillow-case; "I feel well enough, an' I don't know what has got me to talkin' so much about dyin' lately, or thinkin' about it. I guess it's the spring weather. P'r'aps flowers growin' make anybody think of wings sproutin' kinder naterally. I won't talk so much about it if it bothers you, an' I don't know but it's sorter nateral it should. Did you get the potatoes before we came out, sister?" —with an awkward and kindly effort to change the subject.

"No," replied the other, stooping over the clothes-basket. There was such a film of tears in her dull blue eyes that she could not distinguish one article from another.

"Well, I guess you had better go in an' get 'em, then; they ain't worth anything, this time of year, unless they soak a while, an' I'll finish hangin' out the clothes while you do it."

"Well, p'raps I'd better," the other woman replied, straightening herself up from the clothes-basket. Then she went into the house without another word; but down in the damp cellar, a minute later, she sobbed over the potato barrel as if her heart would break. Her sister's remarks had filled her with a vague apprehension and grief which she could not throw off. And there was something a little singular about it. Both these women had always been of a deeply religious cast of mind. They had studied the Bible faithfully, if not understandingly and their religion had strongly tinged their daily life. They knew almost as much about the Old Testament prophets as they did about their neighbours; and that was saying a good deal of two single women in a New England country town. Still this religious element in their natures could hardly have been termed spirituality. It deviated from that as much as anything of religion—which is in one way spirituality itself—could.

Both sisters were eminently practical in all affairs of life, down to their very dreams and Priscilla especially so. She had dealt in religion with the bare facts of sin and repentance, future punishment and reward. She

had dwelt very little, probably, upon the poetic splendours of the Eternal City, and talked about them still less. Indeed, she had always been reticent about her religious convictions, and had said very little about them even to her sister.

The two women, with God in their thoughts every moment, seldom had spoken his name to each other. For Priscilla to talk in the strain that she had to-day, and for a week or two previous, off and on, was, from its extreme deviation from her usual custom, certainly startling.

Poor Mary, sobbing over the potato barrel, thought it was a sign of approaching death. She had a few superstitious-like grafts upon her practical, commonplace character.

She wiped her eyes finally, and went upstairs with her tin basin of potatoes, which were carefully washed and put to soak by the time her sister came in with the empty basket.

At twelve exactly the two sat down to dinner in the clean kitchen, which was one of the two rooms the cottage boasted. The narrow entry ran from the front door to the back. On one side was the kitchen and living-room ; on the other, the room where the sisters slept. There were two small un-

finished lofts overhead, reached by a step-ladder through a little scuttle in the entry ceiling : and that was all. The sisters had earned the cottage and paid for it years before, by working as tailoresses. They had, besides, quite a snug little sum in the bank, which they had saved out of their hard earnings. There was no need for Priscilla and Mary to work so hard, people said ; but work hard they did, and work hard they would as long as they lived. The mere habit of work had become as necessary to them as breathing.

Just as soon as they had finished their meal and cleared away the dishes, they put on some clean starched purple prints, which were their afternoon dresses, and seated themselves with their work at the two front windows ; the house faced south-west, so the sunlight streamed through both. It was a very warm day for the season, and the windows were open. Close to them in the yard outside stood great clumps of lilac bushes. They grew on the other side of the front door too ; a little later the low cottage would look half-buried in them. The shadows of their leaves made a dancing network over the freshly washed yellow floor.

The two sisters sat there and sewed on

some coarse vests all the afternoon. Neither made a remark often. The room, with its glossy little cooking-stove, its eight-day clock on the mantel, its chintz-cushioned rocking-chairs, and the dancing shadows of the lilac leaves on its yellow floor, looked pleasant and peaceful.

Just before six o'clock a neighbour dropped in with her cream pitcher to borrow some milk for tea, and she sat down for a minute's chat after she had got it filled. They had been talking a few moments on neighbourhood topics, when all of a sudden Priscilla let her work fall and raised her hand. "Hush!" whispered she.

The other two stopped talking, and listened, staring at her wonderingly, but they could hear nothing.

"What is it, Miss Priscilla?" asked the neighbour, with round blue eyes. She was a pretty young thing, who had not been married long.

"Hush! Don't speak. Don't you hear that beautiful music?" Her ear was inclined towards the open window, her hand still raised warningly, and her eyes fixed on the opposite wall beyond them.

Mary turned visibly paler than her usual dull paleness, and shuddered. "I don't

hear any music," she said. "Do you, Miss Moore?"

"No-o," replied the caller, her simple little face beginning to put on a scared look, from a vague sense of a mystery she could not fathom. Mary Brown rose and went to the door, and looked eagerly up and down the street. "There ain't no organ-man in sight anywhere," said she, returning, "an' I can't hear any music, an' Miss Moore can't, an' we're both sharp enough o' hearin'. You're jest imaginin' it, sister."

"I never imagined anything in my life," returned the other, "an' it ain't likely I'm goin' to begin now. It's the beautifulest music. It comes from over the orchard there. Can't you hear it? But it seems to me it's growin' a little fainter like now. I guess it's movin' off, perhaps."

Mary Brown set her lips hard. The grief and anxiety she had felt lately turned suddenly to unreasoning anger against the cause of it; through her very love she fired with quick wrath at the beloved object. Still she did not say much, only, "I guess it must be movin' off," with a laugh, which had an unpleasant ring in it.

After the neighbour had gone, however, she said more, standing before her sister

with her arms folded squarely across her bosom. "Now, Priscilla Brown," she exclaimed, "I think it's about time to put a stop to this. I've heard about enough of it. What do you s'pose Miss Moore thought of you? Next thing it'll be all over town that you're gettin' spiritual notions. To-day it's music that nobody else can hear, an' yesterday you smelled roses, and there ain't one in blossom this time o' year, and all the time you're talkin' about dyin'. For my part, I don't see why you ain't as likely to live as I am. You're uncommon hearty on vittles. You ate a pretty good dinner to-day for a dyin' person."

"I didn't say I was goin' to die," replied Priscilla meekly: the two sisters seemed suddenly to have changed natures. "An' I'll try not to talk so, if it plagues you. I told you I wouldn't this mornin', but the music kinder took me by surprise like, an' I thought may be you an' Miss Moore could hear it. I can jest hear it a little bit now, like the dyin' away of a bell."

"There you go agin!" cried the other sharply. "Do, for mercy's sake, stop, Priscilla. There ain't no music."

"Well, I won't talk any more about it," she answered patiently; and she rose and

began setting the table for tea, while Mary sat down and resumed her sewing, drawing the thread through the cloth with quick, uneven jerks.

That night the pretty girl neighbour was aroused from her first sleep by a distressed voice at her bedroom window, crying, "Miss Moore ! Miss Moore !"

She spoke to her husband, who opened the window. "What's wanted ?" he asked, peering out into the darkness.

"Priscilla's sick," moaned the distressed voice ; "awful sick. She's fainted, an' I can't bring her to. Go for the doctor—quick ! quick ! *quick !*" The voice ended in a shriek on the last word, and the speaker turned and ran back to the cottage, where, on the bed, lay a pale, gaunt woman, who had not stirred since she left it. Immovable through all her sister's agony, she lay there, her features shaping themselves out more and more from the shadows, the bed-clothes that covered her limbs taking on an awful rigidity.

"She must have died in her sleep," the doctor said, when he came, "without a struggle."

When Mary Brown really understood that her sister was dead, she left her to the

kindly ministrations of the good women who are always ready at such times in a country place, and went and sat by the kitchen window in the chair which her sister had occupied that afternoon.

There the women found her when the last offices had been done for the dead.

"Come home with me to-night," one said; "Miss Green will stay with *her*," with a turn of her head towards the opposite room, and an emphasis on the pronoun which distinguished it at once from one applied to a living person.

"No," said Mary Brown; "I'm a-goin' to set here an' listen." She had the window wide open, leaning her head out into the chilly night air.

The women looked at each other; one tapped her head, another nodded hers. "Poor thing!" said a third.

"You see," went on Mary Brown, still speaking with her head leaned out of the window, "I was cross with her this afternoon because she talked about hearin' music. I was cross, an' spoke up sharp to her, because I loved her, but I don't think she knew. I didn't want to think she was goin' to die, but she was. An' she heard the music. It was true. An' now I'm a-goin'

to set here an' listen till I hear it too, an' then I'll know she ain't laid up what I said agin me, an' that I'm a-goin' to die too."

They found it impossible to reason with her ; there she sat till morning, with a pitying woman beside her, listening all in vain for unearthly melody.

Next day they sent for a widowed niece of the sisters, who came at once, bringing her little boy with her. She was a kindly young woman, and took up her abode in the little cottage, and did the best she could for her poor aunt, who, it soon became evident, would never be quite herself again. There she would sit at the kitchen window and listen day after day. She took a great fancy to her niece's little boy, and used often to hold him in her lap as she sat there. Once in a while she would ask him if he heard any music. "An innocent little thing like him might hear quicker than a hard, unbelievin' old woman like me," she told his mother once.

She lived so for nearly a year after her sister died. It was evident that she failed gradually and surely, though there was no apparent disease. It seemed to trouble her exceedingly that she never heard the music she listened for. She had an idea that she

could not die unless she did, and her whole soul seemed filled with longing to join her beloved twin sister, and be assured of her forgiveness. This sister-love was all she had ever felt, besides her love of God, in any strong degree ; all the passion of devotion of which this homely, commonplace woman was capable was centred in that, and the unsatisfied strength of it was killing her. The weaker she grew, the more earnestly she listened. She was too feeble to sit up, but she would not consent to lie in bed, and made them bolster her up with pillows in a rocking-chair by the window. At last she died, in the spring, a week or two before her sister had the preceding year. The season was a little more advanced this year, and the apple-trees were blossomed out further than they were then. She died about ten o'clock in the morning. The day before her niece had been called into the room by a shrill cry of rapture from her . " I 've heard it ! I 've heard it ! " she cried. " A faint sound o' music, like the dyin' away of a bell."

A MORAL EXIGENCY.

AT five o'clock Eunice Fairweather went upstairs to dress herself for the sociable and Christmas-tree to be given at the parsonage that night in honour of Christmas Eve. She had been very busy all day, making preparations for it. She was the minister's daughter, and had, of a necessity, to take an active part in such affairs.

She took it, as usual, loyally and energetically, but there had always been seasons from her childhood—and she was twenty-five now—when the social duties to which she had been born seemed a weariness and a bore to her. They had seemed so to-day. She had patiently and faithfully sewed up little lace bags with divers-coloured worsteds, and stuffed them with candy. She had strung pop-corn, and marked the parcels which had been pouring in since daybreak from all quarters. She had taken her prominent part among the corps of indefatigable women always present to assist on

such occasions, and kept up her end of the line as minister's daughter bravely. Now, however, the last of the zealous, chattering women she had been working with had hustled home, with a pleasant importance in every hitch of her shawled shoulders, and would not bustle back again until half-past six or so ; and the tree, fully bedecked, stood in unconscious impressiveness in the parsonage parlour.

Eunice had come upstairs with the resolution to dress herself directly for the festive occasion, and to hasten down again to be in readiness for new exigencies. Her mother was delicate, and had kept her room all day in order to prepare herself for the evening, her father was inefficient at such times, there was no servant, and the brunt of everything came on her.

But her resolution gave way ; she wrapped herself in an old plaid shawl and lay down on her bed to rest a few minutes. She did not close her eyes, but lay studying idly the familiar details of the room. It was small, and one side ran in under the eaves ; for the parsonage was a cottage. There was one window, with a white cotton curtain trimmed with tasselled fringe, and looped up on an old porcelain knob with a picture

painted on it. That knob, with its tiny bright landscape, had been one of the pretty wonders of Eunice's childhood. She looked at it even now with interest, and the marvel and the beauty of it had not wholly departed for her eyes. The walls of the little room had a scraggly-patterned paper on them. The first lustre of it had departed, for that too was one of the associates of Eunice's childhood, but in certain lights there was a satin sheen and a blue line visible. Blue roses on a satin ground had been the original pattern. It had never been pretty, but Eunice had always had faith in it. There was an ancient straw matting on the floor, a home-made braided rug before the cottage bedstead, and one before the stained-pine bureau. There were a few poor attempts at adornment on the walls; a splint letter-case, a motto worked in worsteds, a gay print of an eminently proper little girl holding a faithful little dog.

This last, in its brilliant crudeness, was not a work of art, but Eunice believed in it. She was a conservative creature. Even after her year at the seminary, for which money had been scraped together five years ago, she had the same admiring trust in all the revelations of her childhood. Her home, on her

return to it, looked as fair to her as it had always done ; no old ugliness which familiarity had caused to pass unnoticed before gave her a shock of surprise.

She lay quietly, her shawl shrugged up over her face, so only her steady, light-brown eyes were visible. The room was drearily cold. She never had a fire ; one in a sleeping room would have been sinful luxury in the poor minister's family. Even her mother's was only warmed from the sitting-room.

In sunny weather Eunice's room was cheerful, and its look, if not actually its atmosphere, would warm one a little, for the windows faced south-west. But to-day all the light had come through low, grey clouds, for it had been threatening snow ever since morning, and the room had been dismal.

A comfortless dusk was fast spreading over everything now. Eunice rose at length, thinking that she must either dress herself speedily or go downstairs for a candle.

She was a tall, heavily-built girl, with large, well-formed feet and hands. She had a full face, and a thick, colourless skin. Her features were coarse, but their combination affected one pleasantly. It was a staunch, honest face, with a suggestion of obstinacy in it.

She looked unhappily at herself in her little square glass, as she brushed out her hair and arranged it in a smooth twist at the top of her head. It was not becoming, but it was the way she had always done it. She did not admire the effect herself when the coiffure was complete, neither did she survey her appearance complacently when she had gotten into her best brown cashmere dress, with its ruffle of starched lace in the neck. But it did not occur to her that any change could be made for the better. It was her best dress, and it was the way she did up her hair. She did not like either, but the simple facts of them ended the matter for her.

After the same fashion she regarded her own lot in life, with a sort of resigned disapproval.

On account of her mother's ill-health, she had been encumbered for the last five years with the numberless social duties to which the wife of a poor country minister is liable. She had been active in Sunday-school picnics and church sociables, in mission bands and neighbourhood prayer-meetings. She was a church member and a good girl, but the rôle did not suit her. Still she accepted it as inevitable, and would no more have

thought of evading it than she would have thought of evading life altogether. There was about her an almost stubborn steadfastness of onward movement that would for ever keep her in the same rut, no matter how disagreeable it might be, unless some influence outside of herself might move her.

When she went downstairs, she found her mother seated beside the sitting-room stove, also arrayed in her best—a shiny black silk, long in the shoulder-seams, the tops of the sleeves adorned with pointed caps trimmed with black velvet ribbon.

She looked up at Eunice as she entered, a complacent smile on her long, delicate face; she thought her homely, honest-looking daughter charming in her best gown.

A murmur of men's voices came from the next room, whose door was closed.

"Father's got Mr. Wilson in there," explained Mrs. Fairweather, in response to Eunice's inquiring glance. "He came just after you went upstairs. They've been talking very busily about something. Perhaps Mr. Wilson wants to exchange."

Just at that moment the study door opened and the two men came out, Eunice's father, tall and round-shouldered, with greyish sandy hair and beard, politely al-

lowing his guest to precede him. There was a little resemblance between the two, though there was no relationship. Mr. Wilson was a younger man by ten years; he was shorter and slighter; but he had similarly sandy hair and beard, though they were not quite so grey, and something the same cast of countenance. He was settled over a neighbouring parish; he was a widower with four young children; his wife had died a year before.

He had spoken to Mrs. Fairweather on his first entrance, so he stepped directly towards Eunice with extended hand. His ministerial affability was slightly dashed with embarrassment, and his thin cheeks were crimson around the roots of his sandy beard.

Eunice shook the proffered hand with calm courtesy, and inquired after his children. She had not a thought that his embarrassment betokened anything, if, indeed, she observed it at all.

Her father stood by with an air of awkward readiness to proceed to action, waiting until the two should cease the interchanging of courtesies.

When the expected pause came he himself placed a chair for Mr. Wilson. "Sit

down, brother Wilson," he said nervously, "and I will consult with my daughter concerning the matter we were speaking of. Eunice, I would like to speak with you a moment in the study."

"Certainly, sir," said Eunice. She looked surprised, but she followed him at once into the study. "Tell me as quickly as you can what it is, father," she said, "for it is nearly time for people to begin coming, and I shall have to attend to them."

She had not seated herself, but stood leaning carelessly against the study wall, questioning her father with her steady eyes.

He stood in his awkward height before her. He was plainly trembling. "Eunice," he said, in a shaking voice, "Mr. Wilson came—to say—he would like to marry you, my dear daughter."

He cleared his throat to hide his embarrassment. He felt a terrible constraint in speaking to Eunice of such matters; he looked shamefaced and distressed.

Eunice eyed him steadily. She did not change colour in the least. "I think I would rather remain as I am, father," she said quietly.

Her father roused himself then. "My dear daughter," he said with restrained

eagerness, "don't decide this matter too hastily, without giving it all the consideration it deserves. Mr. Wilson is a good man ; he would make you a worthy husband, and he needs a wife sadly. Think what a wide field of action would be before you with those four little motherless children to love and care for ! You would have a wonderful opportunity to do good."

"I don't think," said Eunice bluntly, "that I should care for that sort of an opportunity."

"Then," her father went on, "you will forgive me if I speak plainly, my dear. You—are getting older ; you have not had any other visitors. You would be well provided for in this way——"

"Exceedingly well," replied Eunice slowly. "There would be six hundred [dollars] a year and a leaky parsonage for a man and woman and four children, and—nobody knows how many more." She was almost coarse in her slow indignation, and did not blush at it.

"The Lord would provide for his servants."

"I don't know whether he would or not. I don't think he would be under any obligation to if his servant deliberately encum-

bered himself with more of a family than he had brains to support."

Her father looked so distressed that Eunice's heart smote her for her forcible words. "You don't want to get rid of me, surely, father," she said, in a changed tone.

Mr. Fairweather's lips moved uncertainly as he answered: "No, my dear daughter; don't ever let such a thought enter your head. I only—Mr. Wilson is a good man, and a woman is best off married, and your mother and I are old. I have never laid up anything. Sometimes— May be I don't trust the Lord enough, but I have felt anxious about you, if anything happened to me." Tears were standing in his light-blue eyes, which had never been so steady and keen as his daughter's.

There came a loud peal of the door-bell. Eunice started. "There! I must go," she said. "We'll talk about this another time. Don't worry about it, father dear."

"But, Eunice, what shall I say to him?"

"Must something be said to-night?"

"It would hardly be treating him fairly otherwise."

Eunice looked hesitatingly at her father's worn, anxious face. "Tell him," she said

at length, "that I will give him his answer in a week."

Her father looked gratified. "We will take it to the Lord, my dear."

Eunice's lip curled curiously, but she said, "Yes, sir," dutifully, and hastened from the room to answer the door-bell.

The fresh bebies that were constantly arriving after that engaged her whole attention. She could do no more than give a hurried "Good-evening" to Mr. Wilson when he came to take leave, after a second short conference with her father in the study. He looked deprecatingly hopeful.

The poor man was really in a sad case. Six years ago, when he married, he had been romantic. He would never be again. He was not thirsting for love and communion with a kindred spirit now, but for a good, capable woman who would take care of his four clamorous children without a salary.

He returned to his snabby, dirty parsonage that night with, it seemed to him, quite a reasonable hope that his affairs might soon be changed for the better. Of course he would have preferred that the lady should have said yes directly; it would both have assured him and shortened the time until his burdens should be light-

ened ; but he could hardly have expected that, when his proposal was so sudden, and there had been no preliminary attention on his part. The week's probation, therefore, did not daunt him much. He did not really see why Eunice should refuse him. She was plain, was getting older ; it probably was her first, and very likely her last, chance of marriage. He was a clergyman in good standing, and she would not lower her social position. He felt sure that he was now about to be relieved from the unpleasant predicament in which he had been ever since his wife's death, and from which he had been forced to make no effort to escape, for decency's sake, for a full year. The year, in fact, had been up five days ago. He actually took credit to himself for remaining quiescent during those five days. It was rather shocking, but there was a good deal to be said for him. No wife and four small children, six hundred dollars a year, moderate brain, and an active conscience, are a hard combination of circumstances for any man.

To-night, however, he returned thanks to the Lord for his countless blessings with pious fervour, which would have been lessened had he known of the state of Eunice's mind just at that moment.

The merry company had all departed, the tree stood dismantled in the parlour, and she was preparing for bed, with her head full, not of him, but another man.

Standing before her glass, combing out her rather scanty, lustreless hair, her fancy pictured to her, beside her own homely, sober face, another, a man's, blonde and handsome, with a gentle, almost womanish smile on the full red lips, and a dangerous softness in the blue eyes. Could a third person have seen the double picture as she did, he would have been struck with a sense of the incongruity, almost absurdity, of it. Eunice herself, with her hard, uncompromising common-sense, took the attitude of a third person in regard to it, and at length blew her light out and went to bed, with a bitter amusement in her heart at her own folly.

There had been present that evening a young man who was a comparatively recent acquisition to the village society. He had been in town about three months. His father, two years before, had purchased one of the largest farms in the vicinity, moving there from an adjoining State. This son had been absent at the time; he was reported to be running a cattle ranch in one of

those distant territories which seem almost fabulous to New-Englanders. Since he had come home he had been the cynosure of the village. He was thirty and a little over, but he was singularly boyish in his ways, and took part in all the town frolics with gusto. He was popularly supposed to be engaged to Ada Harris, Squire Harris's daughter, as she was often called. Her father was the prominent man of the village, lived in the best house, and had the loudest voice in public matters. He was a lawyer, with rather more pomposity than ability, perhaps, but there had always been money and influence in the Harris family; and these warded off all criticism.

The daughter was a pretty blonde of average attainments, but with keen wits and strong passions. She had not been present at the Christmas tree, and her lover, either on that account, or really from some sudden fancy he had taken to Eunice, had been at her elbow the whole evening. He had a fashion of making his attentions marked: he did on that occasion. He made a pretence of assisting her, but it was only a pretence, and she knew it, though she thought it marvellous. She had met him, but had not before exchanged two words with him.

She had seen him with Ada Harris, and he had seemed almost as much out of her life as a lover in a book. Young men of his kind were unknown quantities heretofore to this steady, homely young woman. They seemed to belong to other girls.

So his devotion to her through the evening, and his asking permission to call when he took leave, seemed to her well-nigh incredible. Her head was not turned, in the usual acceptation of the term—it was not an easy head to turn—but it was full of Burr Mason, and every thought, no matter how wide a starting-point it had, lost itself at last in the thought of him.

Mr. Wilson's proposal weighed upon her terribly through the next week. Her father seemed bent upon her accepting it; so did her mother, who sighed in secret over the prospect of her daughter's remaining unmarried. Either through unworldliness, or their conviction of the desirability of the marriage in itself, the meagreness of the financial outlook did not seem to influence them in the least.

Eunice did not once think of Burr Mason as any reason for her reluctance, but when he called the day but one before her week of probation was up, and when he took her

to drive the next day, she decided on a refusal of the minister's proposal easily enough. She had wavered a little before.

So Mr. Wilson was left to decide upon some other worthy, reliable woman as a subject for his addresses, and Eunice kept on with her new lover.

How this sober, conscientious girl could reconcile to herself the course she was now taking, was a question. It was probable she did not make the effort; she was so sensible that she would have known its futility and hypocrisy beforehand.

She knew her lover had been engaged to Ada Harris; that she was encouraging him in cruel and dishonourable treatment of another woman; but she kept steadily on. People even came to her and told her that the jilted girl was breaking her heart. She listened, her homely face set in an immovable calm. She listened quietly to her parents' remonstrance, and kept on.

There was an odd quality in Burr Mason's character. He was terribly vacillating, but he knew it. Once he said to Eunice, with the careless freedom that would have been almost insolence in another man: "Don't let me see Ada Harris much, I warn you, dear. I mean to be true to you, but she

has such a pretty face, and I meant to be true to her, but you have—I don't know just what, but something she has not."

Eunice knew the truth of what he said perfectly. The incomprehensibleness of it all to her, who was so sensible of her own disadvantages, was the fascination she had for such a man.

A few days after Burr Mason had made that remark Ada Harris came to see her. When Eunice went into the sitting-room to greet her, she kept her quiet, unmoved face, but the change in the girl before her was terrible. It was not wasting of flesh or pallor that it consisted in, but something worse. Her red lips were set so hard that the soft curves in them were lost, her cheeks burned feverishly, her blue eyes had a fierce light in them, and, most pitiful thing of all for another woman to see, she had not crimped her pretty blond hair, but wore it combed straight back from her throbbing forehead.

When Eunice entered, she waited for no preliminary courtesies, but sprang forward, and caught hold of her hand with a strong, nervous grasp, and stood so, her pretty, desperate face confronting Eunice's calm, plain one.

"Eunice!" she cried, "Eunice! why did you take him away from me? Eunice! Eunice!" Then she broke into a low wail, without any tears.

Eunice released her hand, and seated herself. "You had better take a chair, Ada," she said, in her slow, even tones. "When you say *him*, you mean Burr Mason, I suppose."

"You know I do. O Eunice! how could you? how could you? I thought you were so good!"

"You ask me why *I* do this and that, but don't you think he had anything to do with it himself?"

Ada stood before her, clinching her little white hands. "Eunice Fairweather, you know Burr Mason, and I know Burr Mason. You know that if you gave him up, and refused to see him, he would come back to me. You know it."

"Yes, I know it."

"You know it; you sit there and say you know it, and yet you do this cruel thing—you, a minister's daughter. You understood from the first how it was. You knew he was mine, that you had no right to him. You knew if you shunned him ever so little, that he would come back to me. And yet

you let him come and make love to you. You knew it. There is no excuse for you : you knew it. It is no better for him. You have encouraged him in being false. You have dragged him down. You are a plainer girl than I, and a soberer one, but you are no better. You will not make him a better wife. You cannot make him a good wife after this. It is all for yourself — yourself ! ”

Eunice sat still.

Then Ada flung herself on her knees at her side, and pleaded, as for her life. “Eunice, O Eunice, give him up to me ! It is killing me ! Eunice, dear Eunice, say you will ! ”

As Eunice sat looking at the poor, dishevelled golden head bowed over her lap, a recollection flashed across her mind, oddly enough, of a certain recess at the village school they two had attended years ago, when she was among the older girls, and Ada a child to her : how she had played she was her little girl, and held her in her lap, and that golden head had nestled on her bosom.

“Eunice, O Eunice, he loved me first. You had better have stolen away my own heart. It would not have been so wicked

or so cruel. How could you? O Eunice, give him back to me, Eunice, *won't you?*"

"No."

Ada rose, staggering, without another word. She moaned a little to herself as she crossed the room to the door. Eunice accompanied her to the outer door, and said good-bye. Ada did not return it. Eunice saw her steady herself by catching hold of the gate as she passed through.

Then she went slowly upstairs to her own room, wrapped herself in a shawl, and lay down on her bed, as she had that Christmas Eve. She was very pale, and there was a strange look, almost of horror, on her face. She stared, as she lay there, at all the familiar objects in the room, but the most common and insignificant of them had a strange and awful look to her. Yet the change was in herself, not in them. The shadow that was over her own soul overshadowed them and perverted her vision. But she felt also almost a fear of all those inanimate objects she was gazing at. They were so many reminders of a better state with her, for she had gazed at them all in her unconscious childhood. She was sickened with horror at their dumb accusations. There was the little glass she had looked in

before she had stolen another woman's dearest wealth away from her, the chair she had sat in, the bed she had lain in.

At last Eunice Fairweather's strong will broke down before the accusations of her own conscience, which were so potent as to take upon themselves material shapes.

Ada Harris, in her pretty chamber, lying worn out on her bed, her face buried in the pillow, started at a touch on her shoulder. Some one had stolen into the room unannounced—not her mother, for she was waiting outside. Ada turned her head, and saw Eunice. She struck at her wildly with her slender hands. "Go away!" she screamed.

"Ada!"

"Go away!"

"Burr Mason is downstairs. I came with him to call on you."

Ada sat upright, staring at her, her hand still uplifted.

"I am going to break my engagement with him."

"O Eunice! Eunice! you blessed——"

Eunice drew the golden head down on her bosom, just as she had on that old school-day.

"Love me all you can, Ada," she said.

"I want—something."

A MISTAKEN CHARITY.

THERE were in a green field a little, low, weather-stained cottage, with a foot-path leading to it from the highway several rods distant, and two old women—one with a tin pan and old knife searching for dandelion greens among the short young grass, and the other sitting on the door-step watching her, or, rather, having the appearance of watching her.

“Air there enough for a mess, Harriét?” asked the old woman on the door-step. She accented oddly the last syllable of the Harriet, and there was a curious quality in her feeble, cracked old voice. Besides the question denoted by the arrangement of her words and the rising inflection, there was another, broader and subtler, the very essence of all questioning, in the tone of her voice itself; the cracked, quavering notes that she used reached out of themselves, and asked, and groped like fingers in the dark. One would have known by the voice that the old woman was blind.

The old woman on her knees in the grass searching for dandelions did not reply ; she evidently had not heard the question. So the old woman on the door-step, after waiting a few minutes with her head turned expectantly, asked again, varying her question slightly, and speaking louder—

“Air there enough for a mess, do ye s’pose, Harriét?”

The old woman in the grass heard this time. She rose slowly and laboriously ; the effort of straightening out the rheumatic old muscles was evidently a painful one ; then she eyed the greens heaped up in the tin pan, and pressed them down with her hand.

“Wa’al, I don’t know, Charlotte,” she replied hoarsely. “There’s plenty on ’em here, but I ain’t got near enough for a mess ; they do bile down so when you get ’em in the pot ; an’ it’s all I can do to bend my j’int’s enough to dig ’em.”

“I’d give consider’ble to help ye, Harriét,” said the old woman on the door-step.

But the other did not hear her ; she was down on her knees in the grass again, anxiously spying out the dandelions.

So the old woman on the door-step crossed her little shrivelled hands over her calico

knees, and sat quite still, with the soft spring wind blowing over her.

The old wooden doorstep was sunk low down among the grasses, and the whole house to which it belonged had an air of settling down and mouldering into the grass as into its own grave.

When Harriet Shattuck grew deaf and rheumatic, and had to give up her work as tailoress, and Charlotte Shattuck lost her eyesight, and was unable to do any more sewing for her livelihood, it was a small and trifling charity for the rich man who held a mortgage on the little house in which they had been born and lived all their lives to give them the use of it, rent and interest free. He might as well have taken credit to himself for not charging a squirrel for his tenement in some old decaying tree in his woods.

So ancient was the little habitation, so wavering and mouldering, the hands that had fashioned it had lain still so long in their graves, that it almost seemed to have fallen below its distinctive rank as a house. Rain and snow had filtered through its roof, mosses had grown over it, worms had eaten it, and birds built their nests under its eaves; Nature had almost completely overrun and

obliterated the work of man, and taken her own to herself again, till the house seemed as much a natural ruin as an old tree-stump.

The Shattucks had always been poor people and common people; no especial grace and refinement or fine ambition had ever characterised any of them; they had always been poor and coarse and common. The father and his father before him had simply lived in the poor little house, grubbed for their living, and then unquestioningly died. The mother had been of no rarer stamp, and the two daughters were cast in the same mould.

After their parents' death Harriet and Charlotte had lived along in the old place from youth to old age, with the one hope of ability to keep a roof over their heads, covering on their backs, and victuals in their mouths—an all-sufficient one with them.

Neither of them had ever had a lover; they had always seemed to repel rather than attract the opposite sex. It was not merely because they were poor, ordinary, and homely; there were plenty of men in the place who would have matched them well in that respect; the fault lay deeper—in their characters. Harriet, even in her

girlhood, had a blunt, defiant manner that almost amounted to surliness, and was well calculated to alarm timid adorers, and Charlotte had always had the reputation of not being any too strong in her mind.

Harriet had gone about from house to house doing tailor-work after the primitive country fashion, and Charlotte had done plain sewing and mending for the neighbours. They had been, in the main, except when pressed by some temporary anxiety about their work or the payment thereof, happy and contented, with that negative kind of happiness and contentment which comes not from gratified ambition, but a lack of ambition itself. All that they cared for they had had in tolerable abundance, for Harriet at least had been swift and capable about her work. The patched, mossy old roof had been kept over their heads, the coarse, hearty food that they loved had been set on their table, and their cheap clothes had been warm and strong.

After Charlotte's eyes failed her, and Harriet had the rheumatic fever, and the little hoard of earnings went to the doctors, times were harder with them, though still it could not be said that they actually suffered.

When they could not pay the interest on the mortgage they were allowed to keep the place interest free ; there was as much fitness in a mortgage on the little house, anyway, as there would have been on a rotten old apple-tree ; and the people about, who were mostly farmers, and good friendly folk, helped them out with their living. One would donate a barrel of apples from his abundant harvest to the two poor old women, one a barrel of potatoes, another a load of wood for the winter fuel, and many a farmer's wife had bustled up the narrow footpath with a pound of butter, or a dozen fresh eggs, or a nice bit of pork. Besides all this, there was a tiny garden patch behind the house, with a straggling row of currant bushes in it, and one of gooseberries, where Harriet contrived every year to raise a few pumpkins, which were the pride of her life. On the right of the garden were two old apple-trees, a Baldwin and a Porter, both yet in a tolerably good fruit-bearing state.

The delight which the two poor old souls took in their own pumpkins, their apples and currants, was indescribable. It was not merely that they contributed largely towards their living ; they were their own,

their private share of the great wealth of Nature, the little taste set apart for them alone out of her bounty, and worth more to them on that account, though they were not conscious of it, than all the richer fruits which they received from their neighbours' gardens.

This morning the two apple-trees were brave with flowers, the currant bushes looked alive, and the pumpkin seeds were in the ground. Harriet cast complacent glances in their direction from time to time, as she painfully dug her dandelion greens. She was a short, stoutly-built old woman, with a large face coarsely wrinkled, with a suspicion of a stubble of beard on the square chin.

When her tin pan was filled to her satisfaction with the sprawling, spidery greens, and she was hobbling stiffly towards her sister on the door-step, she saw another woman standing before her with a basket in her hand.

"Good-morning, Harriet," she said, in a loud, strident voice, as she drew near. "I've been frying some doughnuts, and I brought you over some warm."

"I've been tellin' her it was real good in her," piped Charlotte from the door-step,

with an anxious turn of her sightless face towards the sound of her sister's footstep.

Harriet said nothing but a hoarse "Good-mornin', Mis' Simonds." Then she took the basket in her hand, lifted the towel off the top, selected a doughnut, and deliberately tasted it.

"Tough," said she. "I s'posed so. If there is anything I 'spise on this airth it's a tough doughnut."

"O Harriét!" said Charlotte, with a frightened look.

"They air tough," said Harriet, with hoarse defiance, "and if there is anything I 'spise on this airth it's a tough doughnut."

The woman whose benevolence and cookery were being thus ungratefully received only laughed. She was quite fleshy, and had a round, rosy, determined face.

"Well Harriet," said she, "I am sorry they are tough, but perhaps you had better take them out on a plate, and give me my basket. You may be able to eat two or three of them if they are tough."

"They air tough—turrible tough," said Harriet stubbornly; but she took the basket into the house and emptied it of its contents nevertheless.

"I suppose your roof leaked as bad as

ever in that heavy rain day before yesterday?" said the visitor to Harriet, with an inquiring squint towards the mossy shingles, as she was about to leave with her empty basket.

"It was turrible," replied Harriet, with crusty acquiescence—"turrible. We had to set pails an' pans everywheres, an' move the bed out."

"Mr. Upton ought to fix it."

"There ain't any fix to it; the old ruff ain't fit to nail new shingles on to; the hammerin' would bring the whole thing down on our heads," said Harriet grimly.

"Well, I don't know as it can be fixed, it's so old. I suppose the wind comes in bad around the windows and doors too?"

"It's like livin' with a piece of paper, or mebbe a sieve, 'twixt you an' the wind an' the rain," quoth Harriet, with a jerk of her head.

"You ought to have a more comfortable home in your old age," said the visitor thoughtfully.

"Oh, it's well enough," cried Harriet, in quick alarm, and with a complete change of tone; the woman's remark had brought an old dread over her. "The old house 'll last as long as Charlotte an' me do. The

rain ain't so bad, nuther is the wind ; there's room enough for us in the dry places, an' out of the way of the doors an' windows. It's enough sight better than goin' on the town." Her square, defiant old face actually looked pale as she uttered the last words and stared apprehensively at the woman.

"Oh, I did not think of your doing that," she said hastily and kindly. "We all know how you feel about that, Harriet, and not one of us neighbours will see you and Charlotte go to the poorhouse while we've got a crust of bread to share with you."

Harriet's face brightened. "Thank ye, Mis' Simonds," she said, with reluctant courtesy. "I'm much obleeged to you an' the neighbours. I think mebbe we'll be able to eat some of them doughnuts if they air tough," she added mollifyingly, as her caller turned down the footpath.

"My, Harriét," said Charlotte, lifting up a weakly, wondering, peaked old face, "what did you tell her them doughnuts was tough fur?"

"Charlotte, do you want everybody to look down on us, an' think we ain't no account at all, just like any beggars, 'cause they bring us in vittles?" said Harriet, with a grim glance at her sister's meek, unconscious face.

"No, Harriét," she whispered.

"Do you want *to go to the poorhouse?*"

"No, Harriét." The poor little old woman on the door-step fairly cowered before her aggressive old sister.

"Then don't hender me agin when I tell folks their doughnuts is tough an' their per-taters is poor. If I don't kinder keep up an' show some sperrit, I sha'n't think nothing of myself, an' other folks won't nuther, and fust thing we know they'll kerry us to the poorhouse. You'd 'a been there before now if it hadn't been for me, Charlotte?"

Charlotte looked meekly convinced, and her sister sat down on a chair in the doorway to scrape her dandelions.

"Did you git a good mess, Harriét?" asked Charlotte, in a humble tone.

"Toler'ble."

"They'll be proper relishin' with that piece of pork Mis' Man brought in yesterday. O Lord, Harriét, it's a chink!"

Harriet sniffed.

Her sister caught with her sensitive ear the little contemptuous sound. "I guess," she said querulously, and with more pertinacity than she had shown in the matter of the doughnuts, "that if you was in the dark, as I am, Harriét, you wouldn't make

fun an' turn up your nose at chinks. If you had seen the light streamin' in all of a sudden through some little hole that you hadn't known of before when you set down on the door-step this mornin', and the wind with the smell of the apple-blows in it came in your face, an' when Mis' Simonds brought them hot doughnuts, an' when I thought of the pork an' greens jest now—— O Lord, how it did shine in! An' it does now. If you was me, Harriét, you would know there was chinks."

Tears began starting from the sightless eyes, and streaming pitifully down the pale old cheeks.

Harriet looked at her sister, and her grim face softened. "Why, Charlotte, hev it that thar is chinks if you want to. Who cares?"

"Thar is chinks, Harriét."

"Wa'al, thar is chinks, then. If I don't hurry, I sha'n't get these greens in in time for dinner.

When the two old women sat down complacently to their meal of pork and dandelion greens in their little kitchen, they did not dream how destiny slowly and surely was introducing some new colours into their web of life, even when it was almost completed, and that this was one of the last

meals they would eat in their old home for many a day. In about a week from that day they were established in the "Old Ladies' Home" in a neighbouring city. It came about in this wise: Mrs. Simonds, the woman who had brought the gift of hot doughnuts, was a smart, energetic person, bent on doing good, and she did a great deal. To be sure she always did it in her own way. If she chose to give hot doughnuts, she gave hot doughnuts; it made not the slightest difference to her if the recipients of her charity would infinitely have preferred ginger cookies. Still a great many would like hot doughnuts, and she did unquestionably a great deal of good.

She had a worthy coadjutor in the person of a rich and childless elderly widow in the place. They had fairly entered into a partnership in good works, with about an equal capital on both sides, the widow furnishing the money, and Mrs. Simonds, who had much the better head of the two, furnishing the active schemes of benevolence.

The afternoon after the doughnut episode she had gone to the widow with a new project, and the result was that entrance fees had been paid, and old Harriet and Charlotte made sure of a comfortable home for

the rest of their lives. The widow was hand in glove with officers of missionary boards and trustees of charitable institutions. There had been an unusual mortality among the inmates of the "Home" this spring, there were several vacancies, and the matter of the admission of Harriet and Charlotte was very quickly and easily arranged. But the matter which would have seemed the least difficult—inducing the two old women to accept the bounty which Providence, the widow, and Mrs. Simonds were ready to bestow on them—proved the most so. The struggle to persuade them to abandon their tottering old home for a better was a terrible one. The widow had pleaded with mild surprise, and Mrs. Simonds with benevolent determination; the counsel and reverend eloquence of the minister had been called in; and when they yielded at last it was with a sad grace for the recipients of a worthy charity.

It had been hard to convince them that the "Home" was not an almshouse under another name, and their yielding at length to anything short of actual force was only due probably to the plea, which was advanced most eloquently to Harriet, that Charlotte would be so much more comfortable.

The morning they came away, Charlotte cried pitifully, and trembled all over her little shrivelled body. Harriet did not cry. But when her sister had passed out the low, sagging door she turned the key in the lock, then took it out and thrust it slyly into her pocket, shaking her head to herself with an air of fierce determination.

Mrs. Simonds' husband, who was to take them to the depot, said to himself, with disloyal defiance of his wife's active charity, that it was a shame, as he helped the two distressed old souls into his light wagon, and put the poor little box, with their homely clothes in it, in behind.

Mrs. Simonds, the widow, the minister, and the gentleman from the "Home" who was to take charge of them, were all at the depot, their faces beaming with the delight of successful benevolence. But the two poor old women looked like two forlorn prisoners in their midst. It was an impressive illustration of the truth of the saying that "it is more blessed to give than to receive."

Well, Harriet and Charlotte Shattuck went to the "Old Ladies' Home" with reluctance and distress. They stayed two months, and then—they ran away.

The "Home" was comfortable, and in some respects even luxurious ; but nothing suited those two unhappy, unreasonable old women.

The fare was of a finer, more delicately served variety than they had been accustomed to ; those finely flavoured nourishing soups for which the "Home" took great credit to itself failed to please palates used to common, coarser food.

"O Lord, Harriét, when I set down to the table here there ain't no chinks," Charlotte used to say. "If we could hev some cabbage, or some pork an' greens, how the light would stream in !"

Then they had to be more particular about their dress. They had always been tidy enough, but now it had to be something more ; the widow, in the kindness of her heart, had made it possible, and the good folks in charge of the "Home," in the kindness of their hearts, tried to carry out the widow's designs.

But nothing could transform these two unpolished old women into two nice old ladies. They did not take kindly to white lace caps and delicate neckerchiefs. They liked their new black cashmere dresses well enough, but they felt as if they broke a

commandment when they put them on every afternoon. They had always worn calico with long aprons at home, and they wanted to now ; and they wanted to twist up their scanty grey locks into little knots at the back of their heads, and go without caps, just as they always had done.

Charlotte in a dainty white cap was pitiful, but Harriet was both pitiful and comical. They were totally at variance with their surroundings, and they felt it keenly, as people of their stamp always do. No amount of kindness and attention—and they had enough of both—sufficed to reconcile them to their new abode. Charlotte pleaded continually with her sister to go back to their old home.

“O Lord, Harriét,” she would exclaim (by the way, Charlotte’s “O Lord,” which, as she used it, was innocent enough, had been heard with much disfavour in the “Home,” and she, not knowing at all why, had been remonstrated with concerning it), “let us go home. I can’t stay here no ways in this world. I don’t like their vittles, an’ I don’t like to wear a cap ; I want to go home and do different. The currants will be ripe, Harriét. O Lord, thar was always a chink, thinking about ’em. I want some of ’em ;

an' the Porter apples will be gittin' ripe, an' we could have some apple-pie. This here ain't good ; I want merlasses fur sweetening. Can't we get back no ways, Harriét ? It ain't far, an' we could walk, an' they don't lock us in, nor nothin'. I don't want to die here ; it ain't so straight up to heaven from here. O Lord, I've felt as if I was slantendicular from heaven ever since I've been here, an' it's been so awful dark. I ain't had any chinks. I want to go home, Harriét."

"We'll go to-morrow mornin'," said Harriet finally ; "we'll pack up our things an' go ; we'll put on our old dresses, an' we'll do up the new ones in bundles, an' we'll jest shy out the back way to-morrow mornin' ; an' we'll go. I kin find the way, an' I reckon we kin git thar, if it is fourteen mile. Mebbe somebody will give us a lift."

And they went. With a grim humour Harriet hung the new white lace caps with which she and Charlotte had been so pestered, one on each post at the head of the bedstead, so they would meet the eyes of the first person who opened the door. Then they took their bundles, stole slyly out, and were soon on the high-road, hobbling along, holding each other's hands, as jubilant as

two children, and chuckling to themselves over their escape, and the probable astonishment there would be in the "Home" over it.

"O Lord, Harriét, what do you s'pose they will say to them caps?" cried Charlotte, with a gleeful cackle.

"I guess they'll see as folks ain't goin' to be made to wear caps agin their will in a free kentry," returned Harriet, with an echoing cackle, as they sped feebly and bravely along.

The "Home" stood on the very outskirts of the city, luckily for them. They would have found it a difficult undertaking to traverse the crowded streets. As it was, a short walk brought them into the free country road—free comparatively, for even here at ten o'clock in the morning there was considerable travelling to and from the city on business or pleasure.

People whom they met on the road did not stare at them as curiously as might have been expected. Harriet held her bristling chin high in air, and hobbled along with an appearance of being well aware of what she was about, that led folks to doubt their own first opinion that there was something unusual about the two old women.

Still their evident feebleness now and then occasioned from one and another more particular scrutiny. When they had been on the road a half-hour or so, a man in a covered wagon drove up behind them. After he had passed them, he poked his head around the front of the vehicle and looked back. Finally he stopped, and waited for them to come up to him.

"Like a ride, ma'am?" said he, looking at once bewildered and compassionate.

"Thankee," said Harriet, "we'd be much obleeged."

After the man had lifted the old women into the wagon, and established them on the back seat, he turned around, as he drove slowly along, and gazed at them curiously.

"Seems to me you look pretty feeble to be walking far," said he. "Where were you going?"

Harriet told him with an air of defiance.

"Why," he exclaimed, "it is fourteen miles out. You could never walk it in the world. Well, I am going within three miles of there, and I can go on a little further as well as not. But I don't see—— Have you been in the city?"

"I have been visitin' my married darter in the city," said Harriet calmly.

Charlotte started, and swallowed convulsively.

Harriet had never told a deliberate falsehood before in her life, but this seemed to her one of the tremendous exigencies of life which justify a lie. She felt desperate. If she could not contrive to deceive him in some way, the man might turn directly around and carry Charlotte and her back to the "Home" and the white caps.

"I should not have thought your daughter would have let you start for such a walk as that," said the man. "Is this lady your sister? She is blind, isn't she? She does not look fit to walk a mile."

"Yes, she's my sister," replied Harriet stubbornly: "an she's blind; an' my darter didn't want us to walk. She felt reel bad about it. But she couldn't help it. She's poor, and her husband's dead, an' she's got four leetle children."

Harriet recounted the hardships of her imaginary daughter with a glibness that was astonishing. Charlotte swallowed again.

"Well," said the man, "I am glad I overtook you, for I don't think you would ever have reached home alive."

About six miles from the city an open buggy passed them swiftly. In it were

seated the matron and one of the gentlemen in charge of the "Home." They never thought of looking into the covered wagon—and indeed one can travel in one of those vehicles, so popular in some parts of New England, with as much privacy as he could in his tomb. The two in the buggy were seriously alarmed, and anxious for the safety of the old women, who were chuckling maliciously in the wagon they soon left far behind. Harriet had watched them breathlessly until they disappeared on a curve of the road; then she whispered to Charlotte.

A little after noon the two old women crept slowly up the footpath across the field to their old home.

"The clover is up to our knees," said Harriet; "an' the sorrel and the white-weed; an' there's lots of yaller butterflies."

"O Lord, Harriét, thar's a chink, an' I do believe I saw one of them yaller butterflies go past it," cried Charlotte, trembling all over, and nodding her grey head violently.

Harriet stood on the old sunken door-step and fitted the key, which she drew triumphantly from her pocket, in the lock, while Charlotte stood waiting and shaking behind her.

Then they went in. Everything was

there just as they had left it. Charlotte sank down on a chair and began to cry. Harriet hurried across to the window that looked out on the garden.

"The currants air ripe," said she; "*an'* them pumpkins hev run all over everything."

"O Lord, Harriét," sobbed Charlotte, "thar is so many chinks that they air all runnin' together!"

GENTIAN.

IT had been raining hard all night ; when the morning dawned clear everything looked vivid and unnatural. The wet leaves on the trees and hedges seemed to emit a real green light of their own ; the tree trunks were black and dank, and the spots of moss on them stood out distinctly.

A tall old woman was coming quickly up the street. She had on a stiffly starched calico gown, which sprang and rattled as she walked. She kept smoothing it anxiously "Gittin' every mite of the stiff'nin' out," she muttered to herself.

She stopped at a long cottage house whose unpainted walls, with white window facings, and wide sweep of shingled roof looked dark and startling through being sodden with rain.

There was a low stone wall by way of fence, with a gap in it for a gate.

She had just passed through this gap when the house door opened, and a woman put out her head.

"Is that you, Hannah?" said she.

"Yes, it's me." She laid a hard emphasis on the last word; then she sighed heavily.

"Hadn't you better hold your dress up comin' through that wet grass, Hannah? You 'll git it all bedraggled."

"I know it. I'm a-gittin' every mite of the stiff'nin' out on't. I worked half the forenoon ironin' on't yesterday, too. Well, I thought I'd got to git over here an' fetch a few of these fried cakes. I thought mebbe Alferd would relish 'em fur his breakfast; an' he'd got to hev 'em while they was hot; they ain't good fur nothin' cold; an' I didn't hev a soul to send—never do. How is Alferd this mornin', Lucy?"

"'Bout the same, I guess."

"'Ain't had the doctor yit?"

"No." She had a little, patient, pleasant smile on her face, looking up at her questioner.

The women were sisters. Hannah was Hannah Orton, unmarried. Lucy was Mrs. Tollet. Alfred was her sick husband.

Hannah's long, sallow face was deeply wrinkled. Her wide mouth twisted emphatically as she talked.

"Well, I know one thing; ef he was my husband he'd hev a doctor."

Mrs. Tollet's voice was old, but there was a childish tone in it, a sweet, uncertain pipe.

"No ; you couldn't make him, Hannah ; you couldn't, no more'n me. Alferd was allers jest so. He 'ain't never thought nothin' of doctors, nor doctors' stuff."

"Well, I'd make him take somethin'. In my opinion he needs somethin' bitter." She screwed her mouth as if the bitter morsel were on her own tongue.

"Lor' ! he wouldn't take it, you know, Hannah."

"He'd hev to. Gentian would be good fur him."

"He wouldn't tech it."

"I'd make him, ef I put it in his tea unbeknownst to him."

"Oh, I wouldn't dare to."

"Land ! I guess I'd dare to. Ef folks don't know enough to take what's good fur 'em, they'd orter be made to by hook or crook. I don't believe in deceivin' generally, but I don't believe the Lord would hev let folks hed the faculty fur deceivin' in 'em ef it wa'n't to be used fur good sometimes. It's my opinion Alferd won't last long ef he don't hev somethin' pretty soon to strengthen of him up an' give him a start. Well, it ain't no use talkin'. I've

got to git home an' put this dress in the wash-tub agin, I s'pose. I never see such a sight—jest look at that! You'd better give Alferd those cakes afore they git cold."

"I shouldn't wonder ef he relished 'em. You was real good to think of it, Hannah."

"Well, I'm a-goin'. Every mite of the stiff'nin's out. Sometimes it seems as ef thar wa'n't no end to the work. I didn't know how to git out this mornin', anyway."

When Mrs. Tollet entered the house she found her husband in a wooden rocking-chair with a calico cushion, by the kitchen window. He was a short, large-framed old man, but he was very thin. There were great hollows in his yellow cheeks.

"What you got thar, Lucy?"

"Some griddle-cakes Hannah brought."

"Griddle-cakes!"

"They're real nice-lookin' ones. Don't you think you'd relish one or two, Alferd?"

"Ef you an' Hannah want griddle-cakes, you kin hev griddle-cakes."

"Then you don't want to hev one, with some maple merlasses on it? They've kept hot; she hed 'em kivered up."

"Take 'em away."

She set them meekly on the pantry shelf; then she came back and stood before her

husband, gentle deprecation in her soft, old face and in the whole poise of her little slender body.

"What *will* you hev fur breakfast, Alferd?"

"I don' know. Well, you might as well fry a little slice of bacon, an' git a cup of tea."

"Ain't you 'most afeard of — bacon, Alferd?"

"No, I ain't. Ef anybody's sick, they kin tell what they want themselves 'bout as well's anybody kin tell 'em. They don't hev any hankerin' arter anythin' unless it's good for 'em. When they need anythin', natur gives 'em a longin' arter it. I wish you'd hurry up an' cook that bacon, Lucy. I'm awful faint at my stomach."

She cooked the bacon and made the tea with no more words. Indeed, it was seldom that she used as many as she had now. Alfred Tollet, ever since she had married him, had been the sole autocrat of all her little Russias; her very thoughts had followed after him, like sheep.

After breakfast she went about putting her house in order for the day. When that was done, and she was ready to sit down with her sewing, she found that her husband

had fallen asleep in his chair. She stood over him a minute, looking at his pale old face with the sincerest love and reverence. Then she sat down by the window and sewed, but not long. She got her bonnet and shawl stealthily, and stole out of the house. She sped quickly down the village street. She was light-footed for an old woman. She slackened her pace when she reached the village store, and crept hesitatingly into the great lumbering, rank-smelling room, with its dark, newly-sprinkled floor. She bought a bar of soap ; then she stood irresolute.

"Anything else this mornin', Mis' Tollet?" The proprietor himself, a narrow-shouldered, irritable man, was waiting on her. His tone was impatient. Mrs. Tollet was too absorbed to notice it. She stood hesitating.

"Is there anything else you want?"

"Well—I don' know ; but—p'rhaps I'd better—hev—ten cents' wuth of gentian." Her very lips were white ; she had an expression of frightened, guilty resolution. If she had asked for strychnine, with a view to her own bodily destruction, she would not have had a different look.

The man mistook it, and his conscience smote him. He thought his manner had frightened her, but she had never noticed it.

"Goin' to give your husband some bitters?" he asked affably, as he handed her the package.

She started and blushed. "No—I—thought some would be good fur—me."

"Well, gentian is a first-rate bitter. Good morning, Mis' Tollet."

"Good morning, Mr. Gill."

She was trembling all over when she reached her house door. There is a subtle, easily raised wind which blows spirits about like leaves, and she had come into it with her little paper of gentian. She had hidden the parcel in her pocket before she entered the kitchen. Her husband was awake. He turned his wondering, half-resentful eyes towards her without moving his head.

"Where hev you been, Lucy?"

"I—jest went down to the store a minit, Alferd, while you was asleep."

"What fur?"

"A bar of soap."

Alfred Tollet had always been a very healthy man until this spring. Some people thought that his illness was alarming now, more from its unwontedness and consequent effect on his mind, than from anything serious in its nature. However that may have been, he had complained of great depression

and languor all the spring, and had not attempted to do any work.

It was the beginning of May now.

"Ef Alferd kin only git up May hill," Mrs. Tollet's sister had said to her, "he'll git along all right through the summer. It's a dretful tryin' time."

So up May hill, under the white apple and plum boughs, over the dandelions and the young grass, Alfred Tollet climbed, pushed and led faithfully by his loving old wife. At last he stood triumphantly on the summit of that fair hill, with its sweet wearisome ascent. When the first of June came people said, "Alfred Tollet's a good deal better."

He began to plant a little and bestir himself.

"Alferd's out workin' in the garden," Mrs. Tollet told her sister one afternoon. She had strolled over to her house with her knitting after dinner.

"You don't say so! Well, I thought when I see him Sunday that he was lookin' better. He's got through May, an' I guess he'll pull through. I did feel kinder worried 'bout him one spell—— Why, Lucy, what's the matter?"

"Nothin'. Why?"

"You looked at me dretful kind of queer an' distressed, I thought."

"I guess you must hev imagined it, Hannah. Thar ain't nothin' the matter." She tried to look unconcernedly at her sister, but her lips were trembling.

"Well, I don't know 'bout it. You look kinder queer now. I guess you walked too fast comin' over here. You allers did race."

"Mebbe I did."

"For the land sake, jest see that dust you tracked in! I've got to git the dust-pan an' brush now, an' sweep it up."

"I'll do it."

"No; set still. I'd rather see to it myself."

As the summer went on Alfred Tollet continued to improve. He was as hearty as ever by September. But his wife seemed to lose as he gained. She grew thin, and her small face had a solemn, anxious look. She went out very little. She did not go to church at all, and she had been a devout church-goer. Occasionally she went over to her sister's, that was all. Hannah watched her shrewdly. She was a woman who arrived at conclusions slowly; but she never turned aside from the road to them.

"Look-a here, Lucy," she said one day, "I know what's the matter with you; thar's

somethin' on your mind ; an' I think you'd better out with it."

The words seemed propelled like bullets by her vehemence. Lucy shrank down and away from them, her pitiful eyes turned up towards her sister.

"O Hannah, you scare me ; I don't know what you mean."

"Yes, you do. Do you s'pose I'm blind ? You're worrying yourself to death, an' I want to know the reason why. Is it any-thing 'bout Alferd ?"

"Yes—don't, Hannah."

"Well, I'll go over an' give him a piece of my mind ! I'll see——"

"O Hannah, don't ! It ain't him. It's me—it's me."

"What on airth hev you done ?"

Mrs. Tollet began to sob.

"For the land sake, stop cryin' an' tell me !"

"Oh, I—give him—gentian !"

"Lucy Ann Tollet, air you crazy ? What ef you did give him gentian ? I don't see nothin' to take on so about."

"I—deceived him, an' it's been 'most killin' me to think on 't ever since."

"What do you mean ?"

"I put it in his tea, the way you said."

"An' he never knew it?"

"He kinder complained 'bout its tastin' bitter, an' I told him 'twas his mouth. He asked me ef it didn't taste bitter to me, an' I said, 'No.' I don' know nothin' what's goin' to become of me. Then I had to be so keerful 'bout putting too much on't in his tea, that I was afraid he wouldn't get enough. So I put little sprinklin's on't in the bread an' pies an' everythin' I cooked. An' when he'd say nothin' tasted right now-adays, an' somehow everything was kinder bitterish, I'd tell him it must be his mouth."

"Look here, Lucy, you didn't eat everythin' with gentian in it yourself?"

"'Course I did."

"Fur the land sake!"

"I s'pose the stuff must hev done him good; he's picked right up ever since he begun takin' it. But I can't git over my deceivin' of him so. I've 'bout made up my mind to tell him."

"Well, all I've got to say is you're a big fool if you do. I declare, Lucy Ann Tollet, I never saw sech a woman! The idee of your worryin' over such a thing as that, when it's done Alferd good, too! P'rhaps you'd ruther he'd died?"

"Sometimes I think I hed 'most ruther."

"Well!"

In the course of a few days Mrs. Tollet did tell her husband. He received her disclosure in precisely the way she had known that he would. Her nerves received just the shock which they were braced to meet.

They had come home from meeting on a Sunday night. Mrs. Tollet stood before him; she had not even taken off her shawl and little black bonnet.

"Alferd," said she, "I've got somethin' to tell you; it's been on my mind a long time. I meant it all fur the best; but I've been doin' somethin' wrong. I've been deceivin' of you. I give you gentian last spring when you was so poorly. I put little sprinklin's on't into everything you ate. An' I didn't tell the truth when I said 'twas your mouth, an' it didn't taste bitter to me."

The old man half closed his eyes, and looked at her intently; his mouth widened out rigidly. "You put a little gentian into everything I ate unbeknownst to me, did you?" said he. "H'm!"

"O Alferd, don't look at me so! I meant it all fur the best. I was afeard you wouldn't git well without you hed it, Alferd. I was dretful worried about you; you didn't know nothin' about it, but I was. I laid

awake nights a-worryin' an' prayin'. I know I did wrong; it wa'n't right to deceive you, but it was all along of my worryin' an' my thinkin' so much of you, Alferd. I was afeard you'd die an' leave me all alone; an'—it 'most killed me to think on't."

Mr. Tollet pulled off his boots, then pattered heavily about the house, locking the doors and making preparations for retiring. He would not speak another word to his wife about the matter, though she kept on with her piteous little protestations.

Next morning, while she was getting breakfast, he went down to the store. The meal, a nice one—she had taken unusual pains with it—was on the table when he returned; but he never glanced at it. His hands were full of bundles, which he opened with painstaking deliberation. His wife watched apprehensively. There was a new teapot, a pound of tea, and some bread and cheese, also a salt mackerel.

Mrs. Tollet's eyes shone round and big; her lips were white. Her husband put a pinch of tea in the new teapot, and filled it with boiling water from the kettle.

"What air you a-doin' on, Alferd?" she asked feebly.

"I'm jest a-goin' to make sure I hev

some tea, an' somethin' to eat without any gentian in it."

"O Alferd, I made these corn-cakes on purpose, an' they air real light. They 'ain't got no gentian on 'em, Alferd."

He sliced his bread and cheese clumsily, and sat down to eat them in stubborn silence.

Mrs. Tollet, motionless at her end of the table, stared at him with an appalled look. She never thought of eating anything herself.

After breakfast, when her husband started out to work, he pointed at the mackerel.

"Don't you tech that," said he.

"But, Alferd——"

"I ain't got nothin' more to say. Don't you tech it."

Never a morning had passed before but Lucy Tollet had set her house in order; to-day she remained there at the kitchen-table till noon, and did not put away the breakfast dishes.

Alfred came home, kindled up the fire, cooked and ate his salt mackerel imperturbably; and she did not move or speak till he was about to go away again. Then she said, in a voice which seemed to shrink of itself, "Alferd!"

He did not turn his head.

"Alferd, you must answer me; I'm in airnest. Don't you want me to do nothin' fur you any more? Don't you never want me to cook anything fur you agin?"

"No; I'm afeard of gittin' things that's bitter."

"I won't never put any gentian in anything agin, Alferd. Won't you let me git supper?"

"No, I won't. I don't want to talk no more about it. In futur I'm a-goin' to cook my vittles myself, an' that's all thar is about it."

"Alferd, if you don't want me to do nothin' fur you, mebbe—you'll think I ain't airnin' my own vittles; mebbe—you'd rather I go over to Hannah's——"

She sobbed aloud when she said that. He looked startled, and eyed her sharply for a minute. The other performer in the little melodrama which this thwarted, arbitrary old man had arranged was adopting a *rôle* that he had not anticipated, but he was still going to abide by his own.

"Mebbe 'twould be jest as well," said he. Then he went out of the door.

Hannah Orton was in her kitchen sewing when her sister entered.

"Fur the land sake, Lucy, what is the matter?"

"I've left him—I've left Alferd! Oh! Oh!"

Lucy Tollet gasped for breath; she sank into a chair, and leaned her head against the wall. Hannah got some water.

"Don't, Lucy—there, there! Drink this, poor lamb!"

She did not quite faint. She could speak in a few minutes. "He bought him a new tea-pot this mornin', Hannah, an' some bread an' cheese and salt mackerel. He's goin' to do his own cookin'; he don't want me to do nothin' more fur him; he's afeard I'll put gentian in it. I've left him! I've come to stay with you!"

"You told him, then?"

"I hed to; I couldn't go on so no longer. He wouldn't let me tech that mackerel, an' it orter hev been soaked. It was salt enough to kill him."

"Serve him right ef it did."

"Hannah Orton, I ain't a-goin' to hev a thing said agin Alferd."

"Well, ef you want to stan' up fur Alferd Tollet, you kin. You allers would stan' up fur him agin your own folks. Ef you want to keep on carin' fur sech a miserable, set, unfeelin'——"

"Don't you say another word, Hannah—not another one ; I won't hear it."

"I ain't a-goin' to say nothin' ; thar ain't any need of your bein' so fierce. Now don't cry so, Lucy. We shell git along real nice here together. You'll get used to it arter a little while, an' you'll see you air a good deal better off without him ; you've been nothin' but jest a slave ever since you was married. Don't you s'pose I've seen it? I've pitied you so, I didn't know what to do. I've seen the time when I'd like to ha' shook Alferd."

"Don't, Hannah."

"I ain't a-goin' to say nothin' more. You jest stop cryin', an' try an' be calm, or you'll be sick. Hev you hed any dinner?"

"I don't want none."

"You've got to eat somethin', Lucy Ann Tollet. Thar ain't no sense in your givin' up so. I've got a nice little piece of lamb, an' some pease an' string-beans, left over, an' I'm a-goin' to get 'em. You've got to eat 'em, an' then you'll feel better. Look-a-here, I want to know ef Alferd drove you out of the house 'cause you give him gentian? I ain't got it through my head yet."

"I asked him ef he'd ruther hev me go, an he said mebbe 'twould be jest as well.

I thought I shouldn't hev no right to stay ef I couldn't git his meals for him."

"Right to stay! Lucy Ann Tollet, ef it wa'n't fur the grace of the Lord, I believe you'd be a simpleton. I don't understand no sech goodness; I allers thought it would run into foolishness some time, an' I believe it has with you. Well, don't worry no more about it; set up an' eat your dinner. Jest smooth out that mat under your feet a little; you've got it all scrolled up."

No bitter herb could have added anything to the bitterness of that first dinner which poor Lucy Tollet ate after she had left her own home. Time and custom lessened, but not much, the bitterness of the subsequent ones. Hannah had sewed for her living all her narrow, single life; Lucy shared her work now. They had to live frugally; still they had enough. Hannah owned the little house in which she lived.

Lucy Tollet lived with her through the fall and winter. Her leaving her husband started a great whirlpool of excitement in this little village. Hannah's custom doubled: people came ostensibly for work, but really for information. They quizzed her about her sister, but Hannah could be taciturn. She did their work and divulged nothing,

except occasionally when she was surprised. Then she would let fall a few little hints, which were not at Lucy's expense.

They never saw Mrs. Tollet; she always ran when she heard any one coming. She never went out to church nor on the street. She grew to have a morbid dread of meeting her husband or seeing him. She would never sit at the window, lest he might go past. Hannah could not understand this; neither could Lucy herself.

Hannah thought she was suffering less and was becoming weaned from her affection, because she did so. But in reality she was suffering more, and her faithful love for her imperious old husband was strengthening.

All the autumn and winter she stayed and worked quietly; in the spring she grew restless, though not perceptibly. She had never bewailed herself much after the first; she dreaded her sister's attacks on Alfred. Silence as to her own grief was her best way of defending him.

Towards spring she often let her work fall in her lap, and thought. Then she would glance timidly at Hannah, as if she could know what her thoughts were; but Hannah

was no mind-reader. Hannah, when she set out for meeting one evening in May, had no conception whatever of the plan which was all matured in her sister's mind.

Lucy watched her out of sight ; then she got herself ready quickly. She smoothed her hair, put on her bonnet and shawl, and started up the road towards her old home.

There was no moon, but it was clear and starry. The blooming trees stood beside the road like sweet, white, spring angels ; there was a whippoorwill calling somewhere over across the fields. Lucy Tollet saw neither stars nor blooming trees ; she did not hear the whippoorwill. That hard, whimsical old man in the little weather-beaten house ahead towered up like a grand giant between the white trees and this one living old woman ; his voice in her ears drowned out all the sweet notes of the spring birds.

When she came in sight of the house there was a light in the kitchen window. She crept up to it softly and looked in. Alfred was standing there with his hat on. He was looking straight at the window, and he saw her the minute her little pale face came up above the sill.

He opened the door quickly and came out. " Lucy, is that you ? "

"O Alferd, let me come home ! I'll never deceive you agin !"

"You jest go straight back to Hannah's this minute."

She caught hold of his coat. "O Alferd, don't—don't drive me away agin ! It'll kill me this time ; it will ! it will !"

"You go right back."

She sank right down at his feet then, and clung to them. "Alferd, I won't go ; I won't ! I won't ! You sha'n't drive me away agin. O Alferd, don't drive me away from home ! I've lived here with you for fifty year a'most. Let me come home an' cook fur you, an' do fur you agin. O Alferd, Alferd !"

"See here, Lucy—git up ; stop takin' on so. I want to tell you somethin'. You jest go right back to Hannah's, an' don't you worry. You set down an' wait a minute. Thar !"

Lucy looked at him. "What do you mean, Alferd ?"

"Never you mind ; you jist go right along."

Lucy Tollet sped back along the road to Hannah's, hardly knowing what she was about. It is doubtful if she realised anything but a blind obedience to her husband's will, and a hope of something roused by a

new tone in his voice. She sat down on the doorstep and waited, she did not know for what. In a few minutes she heard the creak of heavy boots, and her husband came in sight. He walked straight up to her.

"I've come to ask you to come home, Lucy. I'm a-feelin' kinder poorly this spring, an'—I want you ter stew me up a little gentian. That you give me afore did me a sight of good."

"O Alferd!"

"That's what I'd got laid out to do when I see you at the winder, Lucy, an' I was a-goin' to do it."

AN OBJECT OF LOVE.

THERE were no clouds in the whole sky except a few bleak violet-coloured ones in the west. Between them the sky showed a clear, cold yellow. The air was very still, and the trees stood out distinctly.

"Thar's goin' to be a heavy frost, sure enough," said Ann Millet. "I'll hev to git the squashes in."

She stood in the door, surveying the look outside as she said this. Then she went in, and presently emerged with a little black shawl pinned closely over her head, and began work.

This was a tiny white-painted house, with a door and one window in front, and a little piazza, over which the roof jutted, and on which the kitchen door opened, on the rear corner. The squashes were piled up on this piazza in a great yellow and green heap.

"A splendid lot they *air*," said Ann. "I'd orter be thankful." Ann always spoke of her obligation to duty, and never seemed

to think of herself as performing the duty itself. "I'd *orter* be thankful," said she always.

Her shawl, pinned closely over her hair and ears, showed the small oval of her face. The greater part of it seemed to be taken up by a heavy forehead, from under which her deep-set blue eyes looked with a strange, solemn expression. She looked alike at everything, the clear cold sky and the squashes, soberly and solemnly.

This expression, taken in connection with her little delicate old face, had something almost uncanny about it. Some people complained of feeling nervous when Ann looked at them.

"Thar's Mis' Stone comin'," said she. "Hope to goodness she won't stop an' hinder me! Lor' sakes! I'd *orter* hev more patience."

A tall, stooping figure came up the street, and paused at her gate hesitatingly.

"Good evenin', Ann."

"Good evenin', Mis' Stone. Come in, won't ye?"

Mrs. Stone came through the gate, walked up to the piazza, and stopped.

"Gettin' in your squashes, ain't you?"

"Yes. I didn't dare resk 'em out to-

night, it's so cold. I left 'em out last year, an' they got touched, an' it about spoilt 'em."

"Well, I should be kinder afraid to resk 'em; it's a good deal colder than I hed any idea of when I come out. I thought I'd run over to Mis' Maxwell's a minute, so I jest clapped on this head-tie an' this little cape over my shoulders, an' I'm chilled clean through. I don' know but I've tuk cold. Yes; I'd take 'em in. We got oun in last week, such as they was. We ain't got more 'n half as many as you hev. I shouldn't think you could use 'em all, Ann."

"Well, I do. I allers liked squashes, an' Willy likes 'em too. You'd orter see him brush round me, a-roundin' up his back an' purrin' when I'm a-scrapin' of 'em out of the shell. He likes 'em better 'n fresh meat."

"Seems queer for a cat to like sech things. Ourn won't touch 'em; he's awful dainty. How nice an' big your cat looks a-settin' thar in the window!"

"He's a-watchin' of me. He jumped up thar jest the minute I come out."

"He's a good deal of company for you, ain't he?"

"Yes, he is. What on airth I should do

this long winter that's comin', without him, I don' know. Everybody wants somethin' that's alive in the house."

"That's so. It must be pretty lonesome for you anyway. Ruth an' me often speak of it when we look over here, 'specially in the winter season, some of them awful stormy nights we hev."

"Well, I don't mean to complain, anyway. I'd orter be thankful. I've got my Bible an' Willy, an' a roof over my head, an' enough to eat an' wear; an' a good many folks hev to be alone, as fur as other folks is concerned, on this airth. An' p'rhaps some other woman ain't lonesome because I am, an' may be she'd be one of the kind that didn't like cats, an' wouldn't hev got along half as well as me. No: I've got a good many mercies to be thankful fur—more'n I deserve. I never orter complain."

"Well, if all of us looked at our mercies more'n our trials, we'd be a great deal happier. But, sakes! I must be goin'. I'm catchin' cold, an' I'm henderin' you. It's supper-time, too. You've got somethin' cookin' in the house that smells good."

"Yes; it's some stewed tomarter. I allers like somethin' I kin eat butter an' pepper on sech a night as this."

"Well, somethin' of that kind *is* good. Good night, Ann."

"Good night, Mis' Stone. Goin' to meet-in' to-night?"

"I'm goin' ef Ruth don't. One of us has to stay with the children, you know. Good night."

Mrs. Stone had spoken in a very high-pitched tone all the while. Ann was somewhat deaf. She had spoken loudly and shrilly, too; so now there was a sudden lull, and one could hear a cricket chirping somewhere about the door.

Mrs. Stone, pulling her tiny drab cape tighter across her stooping, rounded shoulders, hitched rapidly down the street to her own home, which stood on the opposite side, a little below Ann's, and Ann went on tugging in her squashes.

"I'm glad she's gone," she muttered, looking after Mrs. Stone's retreating figure. "I didn't know how to be hendered a minute. I'd orter hev more patience."

She had to carry in the squashes one at a time. She was a little woman, and although she had been used to hard work all her life, it had not been of a kind to strengthen her muscles: she had been a dressmaker. So she stepped patiently into her kitchen with

a squash, and out without one; then in again with one. She piled them up in a heap on the floor in a corner.

"They'll hev to go up on that shelf over the mantle," said she, "to-morrow. I can't git 'em up thar to-night an' go to meetin' nohow."

She had a double shelf of unpainted pine rigged over the ordinary one for her squashes.

After the squashes were all in Ann took off her shawl and hung it on a nail behind the kitchen door. Then she set her bowl of smoking hot tomato stew on a little table between the windows, and sat down contentedly.

There was a white cloth on the table, and some bread and butter and pie beside the stew. Ann looked at it solemnly. "I'd orter be thankful," said she. That was her way of saying grace. Then she fell to eating with a relish. This solemn, spiritual-looking old woman loved her food, and had a keen lookout for it. Perhaps she got a spiritual enjoyment out of it too, besides the lower material one. Perhaps hot stewed tomatoes, made savoury with butter and pepper and salt, on a frosty November night, had for her a subtle flavour of home

comfort and shelter and coziness, appealing to her imagination, besides the commoner one appealing to her palate.

Before anything else, though—before seating herself—she had given her cat his saucer of warm milk in a snug corner by the stove. He was a beautiful little animal, with a handsome dark striped coat on his back, and white paws and face.

When he had finished lapping his milk, he came and stood beside his mistress's chair while she ate, and purred—he rarely mewed—and she gave him bits of bread from her plate now and then. She talked to him too. "Nice Willy," said she, "nice cat. Got up on the window to see me bring in the squashes, didn't he? There's a beautiful lot of 'em, an' he shall hev some stewed for his dinner, to-morrow, so he shall."

And the cat would purr, and rub his soft coat against her, and look as if he knew just what she meant.

There was a prayer-meeting in the church vestry that evening, and Ann Millet went. She never missed one. The minister, when he entered, always found her sitting there at the head of the third seat from the front, in the right-hand row—always in the same

place, a meek, erect little figure, in a poor, tidy black bonnet and an obsolete black coat, with no seam in the whole of the voluminous back. That had been the style of outside garments when Miss Millet had laid aside dressmaking, and she had never gone a step further in fashions. She had stopped just where she was, and treated her old patterns as conservatively as she did her Bible.

She had had a pretty voice when she was young, people said, and she sang now in a thin sweet quaver the hymns which the minister gave out. She listened in solemn enjoyment to the stereotyped prayers and the speaker's remarks. He was a dull, middle-aged preacher in a dull country town.

After meeting Ann went up and told him how much she had enjoyed his remarks, and inquired after his wife and children. She always did. To her a minister was an unpublished apostle, and his wife and family were set apart on the earth. No matter how dull a parson laboured here, he would always have one disciple in this old woman.

When Ann had walked home through the frosty starlight, she lit her lamp first, and

then she called her cat. She had expected to find him waiting to be let in, but he was not. She stood out on her little piazza, which ran along the rear corner of her house by her kitchen door, and called, "Willy ! Willy ! Willy !"

She thought every minute she would see him come bounding around the corner, but she did not. She called over and over and over, in her shrill, anxious pipe, "Willy ! Willy ! Willy ! Kitty ! Kitty ! Kitty !"

Finally she went into the house and waited awhile, crouching, shivering with cold and nervousness, over the kitchen stove. Then she went outside and called again, "Willy ! Willy ! Willy !" over and over, waiting between the calls, trembling, her dull old ears alert, her dim old eyes strained. She ran out to the road, and looked and called, and down to the dreary garden-patch behind the house, among the withered corn-stalks and the mouldering squash-vines all white with frost. Once her heart leaped ; she thought she saw Willy coming ; but it was only a black cat which belonged to one of the neighbours. Then she went into the house and waited a little while ; then out again ; calling shrilly, "Willy ! Willy !"

There were northern lights streaking the

sky ; the stars shone steadily through the rosy glow ; it was very still and lonesome and cold. The little thin, shivering old woman standing outdoors, all alone in the rude, chilly night air, under these splendid stars and streaming lights, called over and over the poor little creature which was everything earthly she had to keep her company in the great universe in which she herself was so small.

"Willy ! Willy ! Willy !" called Ann. "Oh, where is that cat ? Oh dear ! Willy ! Willy !"

She spent the night that way. Mrs. Stone's daughter Ruth, who was up with a sick child, heard her.

"Miss Millet must have lost her cat," she told her mother in the morning ; "I heard her calling him all night long."

Pretty soon, indeed, Ann came over, her small old face wild and wan. "Hev you seen anything of Willy ?" she asked. "He's been out all night, an' I'm afraid somethin's happened to him. I never knowed him to stay out so before."

When they told her they had not, she went on to the next neighbour's to inquire. But no one had seen anything of the cat. All that day and night, at intervals, people

heard her plaintive, inquiring call, "Willy ! Willy ? Willy !"

The next Sunday Ann was not out at church. It was a beautiful day too.

"I'm goin' to run over an' see if Ann Millet's sick," Mrs. Stone told her daughter, when she returned from church. "She wa'n't out to meetin' to-day, and I'm afraid somethin's the matter. I never knew her to miss goin'."

So she went over. Miss Millet was sitting in her little wooden rocking-chair in her kitchen, when she opened the door.

"Why, Ann Millet, are you sick ?"

"No, I ain't sick."

"You wa'n't out to meetin', an' I didn't know——"

"I ain't never goin' to meetin' agin."

"Why, what *do* you mean ?"

Mrs. Stone dropped into a chair, and stared at her neighbour.

"I mean jest what I say. I ain't never goin' to meetin' agin. Folks go to meetin' to thank the Lord for blessin's, I s'pose. I've lost mine, an' I ain't goin'."

"What *hev* you lost, Ann ?"

"'Ain't I lost Willy ?"

"You don't mean to say you're makin' such a fuss as this over a cat ?"

Mrs. Stone could make a good deal of disapprobation and contempt manifest in her pale, high-featured face, and she did now.

"Yes, I do."

"Well, I 'ain't nothin' agin cats, but I must say I'm beat. Why, Ann Millet, it's downright sinful fur you to feel so. Of course you set a good deal by Willy; but it ain't as ef he was a human creature. Cats is cats. For my part, I never thought it was right to set by animals as ef they was babies."

"I can't hear what you say."

"I never thought it was right to set by animals as ef they was babies."

"I don't keer. It's comfortin' to have live creatures about you, an' I 'ain't never hed anything like other women. I 'ain't hed no folks of my own sence I kin remember, I've worked hard all my life, an' hed nothin' at all to love, an' I've thought I'd orter be thankful all the same. But I did want as much as a cat."

"Well, as I said before, I've nothin' agin cats. But I don't understand any human bein' with an immortal soul a-settin' so much by one."

"I can't hear what you say." Ann could

usually hear Mrs. Stone's high voice without difficulty, but to-day she seemed deafer.

"I don't understand any human bein' with an immortal *soul* a-settin' so much by a *cat*."

"You 've got *folks*, Mis' Stone."

"I know I hev; but folks is trials sometimes. Not that my children are, though. I've got a good deal to be thankful for, I'll own, in that way. But, Ann Millet, I didn't think *you* was one to sink down so under *any* trial. I thought the Lord would be a comfort to you."

"I know all that, Mis' Stone. But when it comes to it, I'm *here* an' I ain't *thar*; an' I've got hands, an' I want somethin' I kin touch." Then the poor soul broke down, and sobbed out loud, like a baby: "I ain't—never felt as ef I'd orter begrutch other—women their homes an' their folks. I thought—p'rhaps—I could git along better without 'em than—some; an' the Lord knowed it, an' seein' thar wa'n't enough to go round, he gave 'em to them that needed 'em most. I 'ain't—never—felt—as ef I'd orter complain. But—thar—was—cats—enough. I might 'a hed—that—much."

"You kin git another cat, Ann. Mis' Maxwell's got some real smart kittens, an' I know she wants to get rid of 'em."

"I don't *want* any of Mis' Maxwell's kittens ; I don't never want any other cat."

"P'rhaps yourn will come back. Now don't take on so."

"What?"

"P'rhaps yourn will come back."

"No, he won't. I'll never see him agin. I've felt jest that way about it from the first. Somebody's stole him, or he's been p'isoned and crawled away an' died, or he's been shot fur his fur. I heerd thar was a boy over the river makin' a cat-skin kerridge blanket, an' I went over thar an' asked him, an' he said he hadn't never shot a cat like Willy. But I don' know. Boys ain't brought up any too strict. I hope he spoke the truth."

"Hark ! I declar' I thought I heard a cat mew somewhar ! But I guess I didn't. I don't hear it now. Well, I'm sorry, Ann. I s'pose I've got to go ; thar's dinner to git, an' the baby's consider'ble fretty to-day. Why, Ann Millet, whar's your squashes?"

"What?"

"Where are your squashes?"

"I throwed 'em away out in the field. Willy can't hev none of 'em now, an' I don't keer about 'em myself."

Mrs. Stone looked at her in horror.

When she got home she told her daughter that Ann Millet was in a dreadful state of mind, and she thought the minister ought to see her. She believed she should tell him if she were not out to meeting that night.

She was not. This touch of grief had goaded that meek, reverential nature into fierceness. The childish earnestness which she had had in religion she had now in the other direction. Ann Millet, in spite of all excuses that could be made for her, was for the time a wicked, rebellious old woman. And she was as truly so as if this petty occasion for it had been a graver one in other people's estimation.

The next day the minister called on her, stimulated by Mrs. Stone's report. He did not find her so outspoken; her awe of him restrained her. Still, this phase of her character was a revelation to him. He told his wife, when he returned home, that he never should have known it was Ann Millet.

In the course of the call a rap came at the kitchen door.

Ann rose and answered it, hopping nervously across the floor. She returned to the minister with more distress in her face than ever.

"Nothin' but a little gal with a Malty cat," said she. "The children hev got wind of my losin' Willy, an' they mean it all right, but it seems as ef I should fly ! They keep comin' and bringin' cats. They'll find a cat that they think mebbe is Willy, an' so they bring him to show me. They've brought Malty and white cats, an' cats all Malty. They've brought yaller cats and black, an' thar wa'n't one of 'em looked any like Willy. Then they've brought kittens that they knowed wa'n't Willy, but they thought mebbe I'd like 'em instead of him. They mean all right, I know ; they're real tender-hearted ; but it 'most kills me. Why, they brought me two little kittens that hadn't got their eyes open jest before you come. They was striped an white, an' they said they thought they'd grow up to look like Willy. They were the Hooper children, an' they knowed him."

It would have been ludicrous if the poor old woman's distress had not been so genuine. However, Mr. Beal, the minister, was not a man to see the ridiculous side ; he could simply be puzzled, and that he was.

It was a case entirely outside his experience, and he did not know how to deal with it. He wondered anxiously what he

had best say to her. Finally he went away without saying much of anything, he was so afraid that what he said might be out of proportion to the demands of the case.

It seemed to him bordering on sacrilege to treat this trouble of Ann Millet's like a genuine affliction, though, on the other hand, that treatment was what her state of mind seemed to require.

Going out the door, he stopped and listened a minute; he thought he heard a cat mew. Then he concluded he was mistaken, and went on. He watched eagerly for Ann the next meeting night, but she did not come. It is doubtful whether or not she ever would have done so if she had not found the cat. She had a nature which could rally an enormous amount of strength for persistency.

But the day after the meeting, she had occasion to go down cellar for something. The cellar stairs led up to the front part of the house; indeed, the cellar was under that part only. Ann went through her chilly sitting-room—she never used it except in summer—and opened the cellar door, which was in the front entry. There was a quick rush from the gloom below, and Willy flew up the cellar stairs.

"Lor' sakes!" said Ann, with a white, shocked face. "He has been down thar all the while. Now I remember. He followed me when I came through here to git my cloak that meetin' night, an' he wanted to go down cellar, an' I let him. I thought he wanted to hunt. Lor' sakes!"

She went back into the kitchen, her knees trembling. The cat followed, brushing against her and purring. She poured out a saucer of milk, and watched him hungrily lapping. He did not look as if he had suffered, though he had been in the cellar a week. But mice were plenty in this old house, and he had probably foraged successfully for himself.

Ann watched him, the white, awed look still on her face. "I s'pose he mewed an' I didn't hear him. Thar he was all the time, jest whar I put him; an' me a-blaamin' of the Lord, an' puttin' of it on him. I've been an awful wicked woman. I ain't been to meetin', an' I've talked, an'— Them squashes I threw away! It's been so warm they 'ain't froze, an' I don't deserve it. I hadn't orter hev one of 'em; I hadn't orter hev anythin'. I'd orter offer up Willy. Lor' sakes! think of me a-sayin' what I did, an' him down cellar!"

That afternoon Mrs. Stone looked across from her sitting-room window where she was sewing, and saw Ann slowly and painfully bringing in squashes one at a time.

"Look here, Ruth," she called to her daughter. "Jest you see. Ann Millet's bringing in them squashes she threw away. I don't believe but what she's come to her senses."

The next meeting-night Ann was in her place. The minister saw her, rejoicing. After meeting he hurried out of his desk to speak to her. She did not seem to be coming to see him as usual.

When she looked up at him there was an odd expression on her face. Her old cheeks were flushing.

"I am rejoiced to see you out, Miss Millet," said the minister, shaking her hand.

"Yes. I thought I'd come out to-night."

"I am so happy to see you are feeling better."

"The cat has come back," said Ann.

A GATHERER OF SIMPLES.

A DAMP air was blowing up, and the frogs were beginning to peep. The sun was setting in a low red sky. On both sides of the road were rich green meadows intersected by little canal-like brooks. Beyond the meadows on the west was a distant stretch of pine woods, that showed dark against the clear sky. Aurelia Flower was going along the road towards her home, with a great sheaf of leaves and flowers in her arms. There were the rosy spikes of hardhack; the great white corymbs of thoroughwort, and the long blue racemes of lobelia. Then there were great bunches of the odorous tansy and pennyroyal in with the rest.

Aurelia was a tall, strongly-built woman; she was not much over thirty, but she looked older. Her complexion had a hard red tinge from exposure to sun and wind, and showed seams as unreservedly as granite. Her face was thin, and her cheek-bones high. She

had a profusion of auburn hair, showing in a loose slipping coil beneath her limp black straw hat. Her dress, as a matter of fashion, was execrable ; in point of harmony with her immediate surroundings, very well, though she had not thought of it in that way. There was a green under-skirt, and a brown over-skirt and basque of an obsolete cut. She had worn it just so for a good many years, and never thought of altering it. It did not seem to occur to her that though her name was Flower, she was not really a flower in regard to apparel, and had not its right of unchangeableness in the spring. When the trees hung out their catkins, she flaunted her poor old greens and browns under them, rejoicing, and never dreamed but they looked all right. As far as dress went, Aurelia was a happy woman. She went over the road to-night at a good pace, her armful of leaves and blossoms nodding ; her spare, muscular limbs bore her along easily. She had been over a good many miles since noon, but she never thought of being tired.

Presently she came in sight of her home, a square unpainted building, black with age. It stood a little back from the road on a gentle slope. There were three great maple-

trees in front of the house ; their branches rustled against the roof. On the left was a small garden ; some tall poles thickly twined with hops were prominent in it.

Aurelia went round to the side door of the house with her armful of green things. The door opened directly into the great kitchen. One on entering would have started back as one would on seeing unexpected company in a room. The walls were as green as a lady's bower with bunches and festoons of all sorts of New England herbs. There they hung, their brave blossoms turning grey and black, giving out strange, half-pleasant, half-disgusting odours. Aurelia took them in like her native air. "It's good to get home," murmured she to herself, for there was no one else : she lived alone.

She took off her hat and disposed of her burden ; then she got herself some supper. She did not build a fire in the cooking-stove, for she never drank tea in warm weather. Instead, she had a tumbler of root-beer which she had made herself. She set it out on one end of her kitchen-table with a slice of coarse bread and a saucer of cold beans. She sat down to them and ate with a good appetite. She looked better with her hat off. Her forehead was an important part of

her face; it was white and womanly, and her reddish hair lay round it in pretty curves; then her brown eyes, under very strongly arched brows, showed to better advantage. Taken by herself, and not compared with other women, Aurelia was not so bad looking; but she never was taken by herself in that way, and nobody had ever given her any credit for comeliness. It would have been like looking at a jack-in-the-pulpit and losing all the impression that had ever been made on one by roses and hyacinths, and seeing absolutely nothing else but its green and brown lines: it is doubtful if it could be done.

She had finished her supper, and was sorting her fresh herbs, when the door opened and a woman walked in. She had no bonnet on her head: she was a neighbour, and this was an unceremonious little country place.

"Good evenin', 'Relia," said she. There was an important look on her plain face, as if there were more to follow.

"Good evenin', Mis' Atwood. Take a chair."

"Been herbin' again?"

"Yes; I went out a little while this afternoon."

"Where'd you go?—up on Green Mountain?"

"No; I went over to White's Woods. There were some kinds there I wanted."

"You don't say so! That's a matter of six miles, ain't it? Ain't you tired?"

"Lor', no," said Aurelia. "I reckon I'm pretty strong, or mebbe the smell of the herbs keeps me up;" and she laughed.

So did the other. "Sure enough—well, mebbe it does. I never thought of that. But it seems like a pretty long tramp to me, though my bein' so fleshy may make a difference. I could have walked it easier once."

"I shouldn't wonder if it did make a difference. I ain't got much flesh to carry round to tire me out."

"You're always pretty well, too, ain't you, 'Relia?"

"Lor', yes; I never knew what 'twas to be sick. How's your folks, Mis' Atwood? Is Viny any better than she was?"

"I don't know as she is, much. She feels pretty poorly most of the time. I guess I'll hev you fix some more of that root-beer for her. I thought that seemed to 'liven her up a little."

"I've got a jug of it all made, down

cellar, and you can take it when you go home, if you want to."

"So I will, if you've got it. I was in hopes you might hev it."

The important look had not vanished from Mrs. Atwood's face, but she was not the woman to tell important news in a hurry, and have the gusto of it so soon over. She was one of the natures who always dispose of bread before pie. Now she came to it, however.

"I heard some news to-night, 'Relia," said she.

Aurelia picked out another spray of hardhack. "What was it?"

"Thomas Rankin's dead."

Aurelia clutched the hardhack mechanically. "You don't mean it, Mis' Atwood! When did he die? I hadn't heard he was sick."

"He wasn't long. Had a kind of a fit this noon, and died right off. The doctor—they sent for Dr. Smith from Alden—called it sunstroke. You know 'twas awful hot, and he'd been out in the field to work all the mornin'. I think 'twas heart trouble; it's in the Rankin family; his father died of it. Doctors don't know everything."

"Well, it's a dreadful thing," said

Aurelia. "I can't realise it. There he's left four little children, and it ain't more'n a year since Mis' Rankin died. It *ain't* a year, is it?"

"It ain't a year into a month and sixteen days," said Mrs. Atwood solemnly. "Viny and I was countin' of it up just before I came in here."

"Well, I guess 'tisin't, come to think of it. I couldn't have told exactly. The oldest of those children ain't more than eight, is she?"

"Ethelind is eight, coming next month: Viny and I was reckinin' it up. Then Edith is six, and Isadore is five, and Myrtie ain't but two, poor little thing."

"What do you s'pose will be done with 'em?"

"I don't know. Viny an' me was talkin' of it over, and got it settled that *her* sister Mis' Loomis, over to Alden, would *hev* to hev 'em. It'll be considerable for her, too, for she's got two of her own, and I don't s'pose Sam Loomis has got much. But I don't see what else can be done. Of course strangers ain't goin' to take children when there is folks."

"Wouldn't *his* mother take 'em?"

"What, old-lady Sears? Lor', no. You

know she was dreadful put out 'bout Thomas marryin' where he did, and declared he shouldn't hev a cent of her money. It was all her second husband's anyway. John Rankin wasn't worth anything. She won't do anything for 'em. She's livin' in great style down near the city, they say. Got a nice house, and keeps help. She might hev 'em jest as well as not, but she won't. She's a hard woman to get along with, anyhow. She nagged both her husbands to death, an' Thomas never had no peace at home. Guess that was one reason why he was in such a hurry to get married. Mis' Rankin was a good-tempered soul, if she wasn't quite so drivin' as some."

"I do feel dreadfully to think of those children," said Aurelia.

"'Tis hard ; but we must try an' believe it will be ruled for the best. I s'pose I must go, for I left Viny all alone."

"Well, if you must, I'll get that root-beer for you, Mis' Atwood. I shall keep thinking 'bout those children all night."

A week or two after that, Mrs. Atwood had some more news ; but she didn't go to Aurelia with it, for Aurelia was the very sub-essence of it herself. She unfolded it gingerly to her daughter Lavinia—a pale,

peaked young woman, who looked as if it would take more than Aurelia's root-beer to make her robust. Aurelia had taken the youngest Rankin child for her own, and Mrs. Atwood had just heard of it. "It's true," said she; "I see her with it myself. Old lady Sears never so much as sent a letter, let alone not coming to the funeral, and Mis' Loomis was glad enough to get rid of it."

Viny drank in the story as if it had been so much nourishing jelly. Her too narrow life was killing her as much as anything else.

Meanwhile Aurelia had the child, and was actively happy, for the first time in her life, to her own *naïve* astonishment, for she had never known that she was not so before. She had naturally strong affections, of an outward rather than an inward tendency. She was capable of much enjoyment from pure living, but she had never had anything of which to be so very fond. She could only remember her father as a gloomy, hard-working man, who never noticed her much. He had a melancholy temperament, which resulted in a tragical end when Aurelia was a mere child. When she thought of him, the same horror which she had when they

brought him home from the river crept over her now. They had never known certainly just how Martin Flower had come to die; but folks never spoke of him to Aurelia and her mother, and the two never talked of him together. They knew that everybody said Martin Flower had drowned himself; they felt shame and a Puritan shrinking from the sin.

Aurelia's mother had been a hard, silent woman before; she grew more hard and silent afterwards. She worked hard, and taught Aurelia to. Their work was peculiar; they hardly knew themselves how they had happened to drift into it; it had seemed to creep in with other work, till finally it usurped it altogether. At first, after her husband's death, Mrs. Flower had tried millinery: she had learned the trade in her youth. But she made no headway now in sewing rosebuds and dainty bows on to bonnets; it did not suit with tragedy. The bonnets seemed infected with her own mood; the bows lay flat with stern resolve, and the rosebuds stood up fiercely; she did not please her customers, even among those uncritical country folk, and they dropped off. She had always made excellent root-beer, and had had quite a reputation in the

neighbourhood for it. How it happened she could not tell, but she found herself selling it; then she made hop yeast, and sold that. Then she was a woman of fertile brain, and another project suggested itself to her.

She and Aurelia ransacked the woods thereabouts for medicinal herbs, and disposed of them to druggists in a neighbouring town. They had a garden also of some sorts—the different mints, thyme, lavender, coriander, rosemary, and others. It was an unusual business for two women to engage in, but it increased, and they prospered, according to their small ideas. But Mrs. Flower grew more and more bitter with success. What regrets and longing that her husband could have lived and shared it, and been spared his final agony, she had in her heart, nobody but the poor woman herself knew; she never spoke of them. She died when Aurelia was twenty, and a woman far beyond her years. She mourned for her mother, but although she never knew it, her warmest love had not been called out. It had been hardly possible. Mrs. Flower had not been a lovable mother; she had rarely spoken to Aurelia but with cold censure for the last few years. People whispered that it was a happy release for the poor girl when her

mother died; they had begun to think she was growing like her husband, and perhaps was not "just right."

Aurelia went on with the business with calm equanimity, and made even profits every year. They were small, but more than enough for her to live on, and she paid the last dollar of the mortgage which had so fretted her father, and owned the whole house clear. She led a peaceful, innocent life, with her green herbs for companions; she associated little with the people around, except in a business way. They came to see her, but she rarely entered their houses. Every room in her house was festooned with herbs; she knew every kind that grew in the New England woods, and hunted them out in their season and brought them home; she was a simple, sweet soul, with none of the morbid melancholy of her parents about her. She loved her work, and the greenwood things were to her as friends, and the healing qualities of sarsaparilla and thoroughwort, and the sweetness of thyme and lavender, seemed to have entered into her nature, till she almost could talk with them in that way. She had never thought of being unhappy; but now she wondered at herself

over this child. It was a darling of a child ; as dainty and winsome a girl baby as ever was. Her poor young mother had had a fondness for romantic names, which she had bestowed, as the only heritage within her power, on all her children. This one was Myrtilla—Myrtie for short. The little thing clung to Aurelia from the first, and Aurelia found that she had another way of loving besides the way in which she loved lavender and thoroughwort. The comfort she took with the child through the next winter was unspeakable. The herbs were banished from the south room, which was turned into a nursery, and a warm carpet was put on the floor, that the baby might not take cold. She learned to cook for the baby—her own diet had been chiefly vegetarian. She became a charming nursing-mother. People wondered. "It does beat all how handy 'Relia is with that baby," Mrs. Atwood told Viny.

Aurelia took even more comfort with the little thing when spring came, and she could take her out with her ; then she bought a little straw carriage, and the two went after herbs together. Home they would come in the tender spring twilight, the baby asleep in her carriage, with a

great sheaf of flowers beside her, and Aurelia with another over her shoulder.

She felt all through that summer as if she were too happy to have it last. Once she said so to one of the neighbours. "I feel as if it wa'n't right for me to be so perfectly happy," said she. "I feel some days as if I was walkin' an' walkin' an' walkin' through a garden of sweet-smellin' herbs, an' nothin' else; an' as for Myrtie, she's a bundle of myrtle an' camphor out of King Solomon's garden. I'm so afraid it can't last."

Happiness had seemed to awake in Aurelia a taint of her father's foreboding melancholy. But she apparently had no reason for it until early fall. Then, returning with Myrtie one night from a trip to the woods, she found an old lady seated on her door-step, grimly waiting for her. She was an old woman and tremulous, but still undaunted and unshaken as to her spirit. Her tall, shrunken form was loaded with silk and jet. She stood up as Aurelia approached, wondering, and her dim old eyes peered at her aggressively through fine gold spectacles, which lent an additional glare to them.

"I suppose you are Miss Flower?" began the old lady, with no prefatory parley.

"Yes," said Aurelia, trembling.

"Well, my name's Mrs. Matthew Sears, an' I've come for my grandchild there."

Aurelia turned very white. She let her herbs slide to the ground. "I—hardly understand—I guess," faltered she. "Can't you let me keep her?"

"Well, I guess I won't have one of my grandchildren brought up by an old yarb-woman—not if I know it."

The old lady sniffed. Aurelia stood looking at her. She felt as if she had fallen down from heaven, and the hard reality of the earth had jarred the voice out of her. Then the old lady made a step towards the carriage, and caught up Myrtie in her trembling arms. The child screamed with fright. She had been asleep. She turned her little frightened face towards Aurelia, and held out her arms, and cried, "Mamma! mamma! mamma!" in a perfect frenzy of terror. The old lady tried in vain to hush her. Aurelia found her voice then. "You'd better let me take her and give her her supper," she said, "and when she is asleep again I will bring her over to you."

"Well," said the old lady doubtfully. She was glad to get the frantic little thing out of her arms, though.

Aurelia held her close and hushed her,

and she subsided into occasional convulsive sobs, and furtive, frightened glances at her grandmother.

"I s'pose you are stopping at the hotel?" said Aurelia.

"Yes, I am," said the old lady stoutly. "You kin bring her over as soon as she's asleep." Then she marched off with uncertain majesty.

Some women would have argued the case longer, but Aurelia felt that there was simply no use in it. The old lady was the child's grandmother: if she wanted her, she saw no way but to give her up. She never thought of pleading, she was so convinced of the old lady's determination.

She carried Myrtie into the house, gave her her supper, washed her, and dressed her in her little best dress. Then she took her up in her lap and tried to explain to her childish mind the change that was to be made in her life. She told her she was going to live with her grandmother, and she must be a good little girl, and love her, and do just as she told her to. Myrtie sobbed with unreasoning grief, and clung to Aurelia; but she wholly failed to take in the full meaning of it all.

She was still fretful, and bewildered by

her rude wakening from her nap. Presently she fell asleep again, and Aurelia laid her down while she got together her little wardrobe. There was a hop pillow in a little linen case, on which Myrtie had always slept; she packed that up with the other things.

Then she rolled up the little sleeping girl in a blanket, laid her in her carriage, and went over to the hotel. It was not much of a hotel—merely an ordinary two-story house, where two or three spare rooms were ample accommodation for the few straggling guests who came to this little rural place. It was only a few steps from Aurelia's house. The old lady had the chamber of honour—a large square room on the first floor, opening directly on to the piazza. In spite of all Aurelia's care, Myrtie woke up and began to cry when she was carried in. She had to go off and leave her screaming piteously after her. Out on the piazza she uttered the first complaint, almost, of her life to the hostess, Mrs. Simonds, who had followed her there.

"Don't feel bad, 'Relia," said the woman, who was almost crying herself. "I know it's awful hard, when you was taking so much comfort. We all feel for you."

Aurelia looked straight ahead. She had the bundle of little clothes and the hop pillow in her arms; the old lady had said, in a way that would have been funny if it had not been for the poor heart that listened, that she didn't want any yarb pillows, nor any clothes scented with yarbs nuther.

"I don't mean to be wicked," said Aurelia, "but I can't help thinking that Providence ought to provide for women. I wish Myrtie was *mine*."

The other woman wiped her eyes at the hungry way in which she said "mine."

"Well, I can't do anything; but I'm scrry for you, if that's all. You'd make enough sight better mother for Myrtie than that cross old woman. I don't b'lieve she more'n half wants her, only she's *so*. She doesn't care anything about having the other children; she's going to leave them with Mis' Loomis; but she says her grandchildren ain't going to be living with strangers, an' she ought to hev been consulted. After all you've done for the child, to treat you as she has to-night, she's the most ungrateful—I know one thing; I'd charge her for Myrtie's board—a good price, too."

"Oh, I don't want anything of that sort," said poor Aurelia dejectedly, listening to

her darling's sobs. "You go in an' try to hush her, Mis' Simonds. Oh!"

"So I will. Her grandmother can't do anything with her, poor little thing! I've got some peppermints. I do believe she's spankin' her—the——"

Aurelia did not run in with Mrs. Simonds; she listened outside till the pitiful cries hushed a little; then she went desolately home.

She sat down in the kitchen, with the little clothes in her lap. She did not think of going to bed; she did not cry nor moan to herself; she just sat there still. It was not very late when she came home—between eight and nine. In about half an hour, perhaps, she heard a sound outside that made her heart leap—a little voice crying pitifully, and saying, between the sobs, "Mamma! mamma!"

Aurelia made one spring to the door. There was the tiny creature in her little nightgown, shaking all over with cold and sobs.

Aurelia caught her up, and all her calm was over. "O you darling! you darling! you darling!" she cried, covering her little cold body all over with kisses. "You sha'n't leave me—you sha'n't! you sha'n't! Little

sweetheart—all I've got in the world. I guess they sha'n't take you away when you don't want to go. Did you cry, and mamma go off and leave you? Did they whip you? They never shall again — never! never! There, there, blessed, don't cry; mamma'll get you all warm, and you shall go to sleep on your own little pillow. O you darling! darling! darling!"

Aurelia busied herself about the child, rubbing the little numb limbs, and getting some milk heated. She never asked how she came to get away; she never thought of anything except that she had her. She stopped every other minute to kiss her and croon to her; she laughed and cried. Now she gave way to her feelings; she was almost beside herself. She had the child all warm and fed and comforted by the kitchen fire when she heard steps outside, and she knew at once what was coming, and a fierce resolve sprang up in her heart: they should not have that child again to-night. She cast a hurried glance around; there was hardly a second's time. In the corner of the kitchen was a great heap of herbs which she had taken down from the walls where they had been drying; the next day she had intended to pack them and send

them off. She caught up Myrtie and covered her with them. "Lie still, darling!" she whispered. "Don't make a bit of noise, or your grandmother will get you again." Myrtie crouched under them, trembling.

Then the door opened; Mr. Simonds stood there with a lantern. "That little girl's run away," he began—"slipped out while the old lady was out of the room a minute. Beats all how such a little thing knew enough. She's here, ain't she?"

"No," said Aurelia, "she ain't."

"You don't mean it?"

"Yes."

"Ain't you seen her, though?"

"No."

Mr. Simonds, who was fat and placid, began to look grave. "Then, all there is about it, we've got to have a hunt," said he. "'Twon't do to have that little tot out in her nightgown long. We hadn't a thought but that she was here. Must have lost her way."

Aurelia watched him stride down the yard. Then she ran after him. "Mr. Simonds!" He turned. "I told you a lie. Myrtie's in the corner of the kitchen under a heap of herbs."

"Why, what on earth——"

"I wanted to keep her so to-night. Aurelia burst right out in loud sobs.

"There, 'Relia ! It's a confounded shame. You shall keep her. I'll make it all right with the old lady somehow. I reckon, as long as the child's safe, she'll be glad to get rid of her to-night. She wouldn't have slept much. Go right into the house, 'Relia, and don't worry."

Aurelia obeyed. She hung over the little creature, asleep in her crib, all night. She watched her every breath. She never thought of sleeping herself—her last night with Myrtie. The seconds were so many grains of gold-dust. Her heart failed her when day broke. She washed and dressed Myrtie at the usual time, and gave her her breakfast. Then she sat down with her and waited. The child's sorrow was soon forgotten, and she played about as usual. Aurelia watched her despairingly. She began to wonder at length why they did not come for her. It grew later and later. She would not carry her back herself, she was resolved on that.

It was ten o'clock before any one came ; then it was Mrs. Simonds. She had a strange look on her face.

"'Relia," she said, standing in the door

and looking at her and Myrtie, "you ain't heard what has happened to our house this mornin', hev you?"

"No," said Aurelia, awed.

"Old Mis' Sears is dead. Had her third shock : she's had two in the last three years. She was took soon after Mr. Simonds got home. We got a doctor right off, but she died 'bout an hour ago."

"Oh," said Aurelia ; "I've been a wicked woman."

"No you ain't, Aurelia ; don't you go to feeling so. There's no call for the living to be unjust to themselves because folks are dead. You did the best you could. An' now you're glad you can keep the child ; you can't help it. I thought of it myself the first thing."

"Oh, I was such a wicked woman to think of it myself," said Aurelia. "If I could only have done something for the poor old soul ! Why didn't you call me?"

"I told Mr. Simonds I wouldn't ; you'd had enough."

There was one thing, however, which Aurelia found to do—a simple and touching thing, though it probably meant more to her than to most of those who knew of it.

On the day of the funeral the poor old

woman's grave was found lined with fragrant herbs from Aurelia's garden — thyme and lavender and rosemary. She had cried when she picked them, because she could not help being glad, and they were all she could give for atonement.

AN INDEPENDENT THINKER.

ESTHER GAY'S house was little and square, and mounted on posts like stilts. A stair led up to the door on the left side. Morning-glories climbed up the stair railing, the front of the house and the other side were covered with them, all the windows but one were curtained with the matted green vines. Esther sat at the uncurtained window, and knitted. She perked her thin, pale nose up in the air, her pointed chin tilted upward too; she held her knitting high, and the needles clicked loud, and shone in the sun. The bell was ringing for church, and a good many people were passing. They could look in on her, and see very plainly what she was doing. Every time a group went by she pursed her thin old lips tighter, and pointed up her nose higher, and knitted more fiercely. Her skinny shoulders jerked. She cast a sharp glance at every one who passed, but no one caught her looking. She knew them all.

This was a little village. By and by the bell had stopped tolling, and even the late church-goers had creaked briskly out of sight. The street, which was narrow here, was still and vacant.

Presently a woman appeared in a little flower-garden in front of the opposite house. She was picking a nosegay. She was little and spare, and she bent over the flowers with a stiffness as of stiff wires. It seemed as if it would take mechanical force to spring her up again.

Esther watched her. "It's dretful hard work for her to git around," she muttered to herself.

Finally, she laid down her knitting and called across to her. "Laviny!" said she.

The woman came out to the gate with some marigolds and candytuft in her hand. Her dim blue eyes blinked in the light. She looked over and smiled with a sort of helpless inquiry.

"Come over here a minute."

"I—guess I—can't."

Esther was very deaf. She could not hear a word, but she saw the deprecating shake of the head, and she knew well enough.

"I'd like to know why you can't, a

minute. You kin hear your mother the minute she speaks."

The woman glanced back at the house, then she looked over at Esther. Her streaked light hair hung in half curls over her wide crocheted collar; she had a little, narrow, wrinkled face, but her cheeks were as red as roses.

"I guess I'd better not. It's Sunday, you know," said she. Her soft, timid voice could by no possibility reach those deaf ears across the way.

"What?"

"I—guess I'd better not—as long as it's *Sunday*."

Esther's strained attention caught the last word, and guessed at the rest from a knowledge of the speaker.

"Stuff," said she, with a sniff through her delicate, uptilted nostrils. "I'd like to know how much worse 'tis for you to step over here a minute, an' tell me how *she* is when I can't hear across the road, than to stop an' talk comin' out o' meetin'; you'd do that quick enough. You're strainin', Lavinia Dodge."

Lavinia, as if overwhelmed by the argument, cast one anxious glance back at the house, and came through the gate.

Just then a feeble, tremulous voice, with a wonderful quality of fine sharpness in it, broke forth behind her.

"Laviny, Laviny, where be you goin'? Come back here."

Lavinia, wheeling with such precipitate vigour that it suggested a creak, went up the path.

"I wa'n't goin' anywhere, mother," she called out. "What's the matter?"

"You can't pull the wool over my eyes. I *seed* you agoin' out the gate."

Lavinia's mother was over ninety and bedridden. That infinitesimal face which had passed through the stages of beauty, commonplaceness, and hideousness, and now arrived at that of the fine grotesqueness which has, as well as beauty, a certain charm of its own, peered out from its great feather pillows. The skin on the pinched face was of a dark-yellow colour, the eyes were like black points, the tiny, sunken mouth had a sardonic pucker.

"Esther *jest* wanted me to come over there a minute. She wanted to ask after you," said Lavinia, standing beside the bed, holding her flowers.

"Hey?"

"She *jest* wanted me to come over an' tell her how you was."

"How I was?"

"Yes."

"Did you tell her I was miser'ble?"

"I didn't go, mother."

"I seed you a-goin' out the gate."

"I came back. She couldn't hear 'thout I went way over."

"Hey?"

"It's all right, mother," screamed Lavinia. Then she went about putting the flowers in water.

The old woman's little eyes followed her, with a sharp light like steel.

"I ain't goin' to hev you goin' over to Esther Gay's, Sabbath-day," she went on, her thin voice rasping out from her pillows like a file. "She ain't no kind of a girl. Wa'n't she knittin'?"

"Yes."

"Hey?"

"Yes, she was knittin', mother."

"Wa'n't knittin'?"

"Y-e-s, she was."

"I knowed it. Stayin' home from meetin' an' knittin'. I ain't goin' to hev you over thar, Laviny."

Esther Gay, over in her window, held her knitting up higher, and knitted with fury. "H'm, the old lady called her back," said

she. "If they want to show out they kin, I'm goin' to do what I think's right."

The morning-glories on the house were beautiful this morning, the purple and white and rosy ones stood out with a soft crispness. Esther Gay's house was not so pretty in winter—there was no paint on it, and some crooked outlines showed. It was a poor little structure, but Esther owned it free of encumbrances. She had also a pension of ninety-six dollars which served her for support. She considered herself well to do. There was not enough for anything besides necessities, but Esther was one who had always looked upon necessities as luxuries. Her sharp eyes saw the farthest worth of things. When she bought a half-cord of pine wood with an allotment of her pension-money, she saw in a vision all the warmth and utility which could ever come from it. When it was heaped up in the space under the house which she used for a wood-shed, she used to go and look at it.

"Esther Gay does think so much of her own things," people said.

That little house, which, with its precipitous stair and festoons of morning-glories, had something of a foreign picturesqueness, looked to her like a real palace. She paid

a higher tax upon it than she should have done. A lesser one had been levied, and regarded by her as an insult. "My house is worth more'n that," she had told the assessor with an indignant bridle. She paid the increased tax with cheerful pride, and frequently spoke of it. To-day she often glanced from her knitting around the room. There was a certain beauty in it, although it was hardly the one which she recognised. It was full of a lovely, wavering, gold-green light, and there was a fine order and cleanliness which gave a sense of peace. But Esther saw mainly her striped rag-carpet, her formally set chairs, her lounge covered with Brussels, and her shining cooking-stove.

Still she looked at nothing with the delight with which she surveyed her granddaughter Hatty, when she returned from church.

"Well, you've got home, ain't you?" she said, when the young, slim girl, with her pale, sharp face, which was like her grandmother's, stood before her. Hatty in her meeting-gown of light-brown delaine, and her white meeting-hat trimmed with light-brown ribbons and blue flowers was not pretty, but the old woman admired her.

"Yes," said Hatty. Then she went into her little bedroom to take off her things. There was a slow shyness about her. She never talked much, even to her grandmother.

"You kin git you somethin' to eat, if you wantit," said the old woman. "I don't want to stop myself till I git this heel done. Was Henry to meetin'?"

"Yes."

"His father an' mother?"

"Yes."

Henry was the young man who had been paying attention to Hatty. Her grandmother was proud and pleased; she liked him.

Hatty generally went to church Sunday evenings, and the young man escorted her home, and came in and made a call. Tonight the girl did not go to church as usual. Esther was astonished.

"Why, ain't you goin' to meetin'?" said she.

"No; I guess not."

"Why? why not?"

"I thought I wouldn't."

The old woman looked at her sharply. The tea-things were cleared away, and she was at her knitting again, a little lamp at her elbow.

Presently Hatty went out, and sat at the head of the stairs, in the twilight. She sat there by herself until meeting was over, and the people had been straggling by for some time. Then she went downstairs, and joined a young man who passed at the foot of them. She was gone half an hour.

"Where hev you been?" asked her grandmother, when she returned.

"I went out a little way."

"Who with?"

"Henry."

"Why didn't he come in?"

"He thought he wouldn't."

"I don't see why."

Hatty said nothing. She lit her candle to go to bed. Her little thin face was imperturbable.

She worked in a shop, and earned a little money. Her grandmother would not touch a dollar of it; what she did not need to spend for herself, she made her save. Lately the old woman had been considering the advisability of her taking a sum from the savings' bank to buy a silk dress. She thought she might need it soon.

Monday, she opened upon the subject. "Hatty," said she, "I've been thinkin'—don't you believe it would be a good plan

for you to take a little of your money out of the bank an' buy you a nice dress?"

Hatty never answered quickly. She looked at her grandmother, then she kept on with her sewing. It was after supper, her shop-work was done, and she was sitting at the table with her needle. She seemed to be considering her grandmother's remark.

The old woman waited a moment, then she proceeded: "I've been thinkin'—you ain't never had any real nice dress, you know—that it would be a real good plan for you to take some money, now you've got it, an' buy you a silk one. You ain't never had one, an' you're old enough to."

Still Hatty sewed, and said nothing.

"You might want to go somewhar," continued Esther, "an'—well, of course, if anythin' should happen, if Henry—— It's jest as well not to hev to do everythin' all to once, an' it's consider'ble work to make a silk dress—— Why don't you say somethin'?"

"I don't want any silk dress."

"I'd like to know why not?"

Hatty made no reply.

"Look here, Hatty, you an' Henry Little ain't had no trouble, hev you?"

"I don't know as we have."

"What?"

"I don't know as we have."

"Hatty Gay, I know there's somethin' the matter. Now you jest tell me what 'tis. Ain't he comin' here no more?"

Suddenly the girl curved her arm around on the table, and laid her face down on it. She would not speak another word. She did not seem to be crying, but she sat there, hiding her little plain, uncommunicative face.

"Hatty Gay, ain't he comin'? *Why* ain't he comin'?"

Hatty would give the old woman no information. All she got was that obtained from ensuing events. Henry Little did not come; she ascertained that. The weeks went on, and he had never once climbed those vine-wreathed stairs to see Hatty.

Esther fretted and questioned. One day, in the midst of her nervous conjectures, she struck the chord in Hatty which vibrated with information.

"I hope you wa'n't too forrard with Henry, Hatty," said the old woman. "You didn't act too anxious arter him, did you? That's apt to turn fellows."

Then Hatty spoke. Some pink spots flared out on her quiet, pale cheeks.

"Grandma," said she, "I'll tell you, if you want to know, what the trouble is. I

wasn't goin' to, because I didn't want to make you feel bad ; but, if you're goin' to throw out such things as that to me, I don't care. Henry's mother don't like you, there !"

"What?"

"Henry's mother don't like you."

"Don't like me?"

"No."

"Why, what hev I done? I don't see what you mean, Hatty Gay."

"Grace Porter told me. Mrs. Little told her mother. Then I asked him, an' he owned up it was so."

"I'd like to know what she said."

Hatty went on pitilessly. "She told Grace's mother she didn't want her son to marry into the Gay tribe anyhow. She didn't think much of 'em. She said any girl whose folks didn't keep Sunday, an' stayed away from meetin' an' worked, wouldn't amount to much."

"I don't believe she said it."

"She did. Henry said his mother took on so he was afraid she'd die, if he didn't give it up."

Esther sat up straight. She seemed to bristle out suddenly with points, from her knitting-needles to her sharp elbows and

thin chin and nose. "Well, he kin give it up then, if he wants to, for all me. I ain't goin' to give up my principles fir him, nor any of his folks, an' they'll find it out. You kin git somebody else jest as good as he is."

"I don't want anybody else."

"H'm, you needn't have 'em then, ef you ain't got no more sperit. I shouldn't think you'd want your grandmother to give up doin' what's right yourself, Hatty Gay."

"I ain't sure it is right."

"Ain't sure it's right. Then I s'pose you think it would be better for an old woman that's stone deaf, an' can't hear a word of the preachin', to go to meetin' an' set there, doin' nothin' two hours, instead of stayin' to home an' knittin', to airn a leetle money to give to the Lord. All I've got to say is, you kin think so, then. I'm a-goin' to do what's right, no matter what happens."

Hatty said nothing more. She took up her sewing again; her grandmother kept glancing at her. Finally she said, in a mollifying voice, "Why don't you go an' git you a leetle piece of that cake in the cupboard; you didn't eat no supper hardly."

"I don't want any."

"Well, if you want to make yourself sick, an' go without eatin', you kin."

Hatty did go without eating much through the following weeks. She laid awake nights, too, staring pitifully into the darkness, but she did not make herself ill. There was an unflinching strength in that little, meagre body, which lay even back of her own will. It would take long for her lack of spirit to break her down entirely; but her grandmother did not know that. She watched her and worried. Still she had not the least idea of giving in. She knitted more zealously than ever Sundays; indeed, there was, to her possibly distorted perceptions, a religious zeal in it.

She knitted on week-days too. She reeled off a good many pairs of those reliable blue-yarn stockings, and sold them to a dealer in the city. She gave away every cent which she earned, and carefully concealed the direction of her giving. Even Hatty did not know of it.

Six weeks after Hatty's lover left, the old woman across the way died. After the funeral, when measures were taken for the settlement of the estate, it was discovered that all the little property was gone, eaten up by a mortgage and the interest. The

two old women had lived upon the small house and the few acres of land for the last ten years, ever since Lavinia's father had died. He had grubbed away in a boot-shop and earned enough for their frugal support as long as he lived. Lavinia had never been able to work for her own living; she was not now. "Laviny Dodge will have to go to the poorhouse," everybody said.

One noon Hatty spoke of it to her grandmother. She rarely spoke of anything now, but this was uncommon news.

"They say Laviny Dodge has got to go to the poorhouse," said she.

"What?"

"They say Laviny Dodge has got to go to the poorhouse."

"I don't believe a word on 't."

"They say it's so."

That afternoon Esther went over to ascertain the truth of the report for herself. She found Lavinia sitting alone in the kitchen crying. Esther went right in, and stood looking at her.

"It's so, ain't it?" said she.

Lavinia started. There was a momentary glimpse of a red, distorted face; then she hid it again, and went on rocking herself to and fro and sobbing. She had seated her-

self in the rocking-chair to weep. "Yes," she wailed, "it's so! I've got to go. Mr. Barnes come in, an' said I had this mornin'; there ain't no other way. I've—got—to go. Oh, what would mother have said!"

Esther stood still, looking. "A place gits run out afore you know it," she remarked.

"Oh, I didn't s'pose it was quite so near gone. I thought mebbe I could stay—as long as I lived."

"You'd oughter hev kept account."

"I s'pose I hed, but I never knew much 'bout money-matters, an' poor mother, she was too old. Father was real sharp, ef he'd lived. Oh, I've got to go! I never thought it would come to this!"

"I don't think you're fit to do any work."

"No; they say I ain't. My rheumatism has been worse lately. It's been hard work for me to crawl round an' wait on mother. I've got to go. O Esther, it's awful to think I can't die in my own home! Now I've got—to die in the poorhouse! I've—got—to die in the poorhouse!"

"I've got to go now," said Esther.

"Don't go. You ain't but jest come. I ain't got a soul to speak to."

"I'll come in agin arter supper," said

Esther, and went out resolutely, with Lavinia wailing after her to come back. At home, she sat down and deliberated. She had a long talk with Hatty when she returned. "I don't care," was all she could get out of the girl, who was more silent than usual. She ate very little supper.

It was eight o'clock when Esther went over to the Dodge house. The windows were all dark. "Land, I believe she's gone to bed," said the old woman, fumbling along through the yard. The door was fast, so she knocked. "Laviny, Laviny, be you gone to bed? Laviny Dodge!"

"Who is it?" said a quavering voice on the other side, presently.

"It's me. You gone to bed?"

"It's you, Mis' Gay, ain't it?"

"Yes. Let me in. I want to see you a minute."

Then Lavinia opened the door and stood there, her old knees knocking together with cold and nervousness. She had got out of bed and put a plaid shawl over her shoulders when she heard Esther.

"I want to come in jest a minute," said Esther. "I hadn't any idee you 'd be gone to bed."

The fire had gone out, and it was chilly

in the kitchen, where the two women sat down.

"You'll ketch you're death of cold in you're night-gown," said Esther. "You'd better git somethin' more to put over you."

"I don't keer if I do ketch cold," said Lavinia, with an air of feeble recklessness, which sat oddly upon her.

"Lavinia Dodge, don't talk so."

"I don't keer. I'd ruther ketch my death of cold than not; then I shouldn't have to die in the poorhouse." The old head, in its little cotton night-cap, cocked itself sideways, with pitiful bravado.

Esther rose, went into the bedroom, got a quilt and put it over Lavinia's knees. "There," said she, "you hev that over you. There ain't no sense in your talkin' that way. You're jest a-flyin' in the face of Providence, an' Providence don't mind the little flappin' you kin make, any more than a barn does a swaller."

"I can't help it."

"What?"

"I—can't help it."

"Yes, you kin help it, too. Now, I'll tell you what I've come over here for. I've been thinkin' on't all the arternoon, an'

I've made up my mind. I want you to come over and live with me."

Lavinia sat feebly staring at her. "Live with you !"

"Yes. I've got my house an' my pension, an' I pick up some with my knittin'. Two won't cost much more'n one. I reckon we kin git along well enough."

Lavinia said nothing, she still sat staring. She looked scared.

Esther began to feel hurt. "Mebbe you don't want to come," she said stiffly, at last.

Lavinia shivered. "There's jest—one thing——" she commenced.

"What ?"

"There's jest one thing——"

"What's that ?"

"I dunno what—— Mother—— You're real good ; but—— Oh, I don't see how I kin come, Esther !"

"Why not ? If there's any reason why you don't want to live with me, I want to know what 'tis."

Lavinia was crying. "I can't tell you," she sobbed ; "but, mother—— If—you didn't work Sundays. Oh !"

"Then you mean to say you'd ruther go to the poorhouse than come to live with me, Lavinia Dodge ?"

"I—can't help it."

"Then, all I've got to say is, you kin go."

Esther went home, and said no more. In a few days she, peering around her curtain, saw poor Livinia Dodge, a little, trembling, shivering figure, hoisted into the poorhouse covered wagon, and driven off. After the wagon was out of sight, she sat down and cried.

It was early in the afternoon. Hatty had just gone to her work, having scarcely tasted her dinner. Her grandmother had worked hard to get an extra one to-day, too, but she had no heart to eat. Her mournful silence, which seemed almost obstinate, made the old woman at once angry and wretched. Now she wept over Lavinia Dodge and Hatty, and the two causes combined made bitter tears.

"I wish to the land," she cried out loud once,—*"I wish to the land I could find some excuse; but I ain't goin' to give up what I think's right."*

Esther Gay had never been so miserable in her life as she was for the three months after Lavinia Dodge left her home. She thought of her, she watched Hatty, and she knitted. Hatty was at last beginning to show the effects of her long worry. She

looked badly, and the neighbours began speaking about it to her grandmother. The old woman seemed to resent it when they did. At times she scolded the girl, at times she tried to pet her, and she knitted constantly, week-days and Sundays.

Lavinia had been in the almshouse three months, when one of the neighbours came in one day and told Esther that she was confined to her bed. Her rheumatism was worse, and she was helpless. Esther dropped her knitting, and stared radiantly at the neighbour. "You said she was an awful sight of trouble, didn't you?" said she.

"Yes; Mis' Marvin said it was worse than takin' care of a baby."

"I should think it would take about all of anybody's time."

"I should. Why, Esther Gay, you look real tickled 'cause she's sick!" cried the woman bluntly.

Esther coloured. "You talk pretty," said she.

"Well, I don't care; you looked so. I don't s'pose you was," said the other, apologetically.

That afternoon Esther Gay made two visits: one at the selectmen's room, in the town-hall, the other at Henry Little's. One

of her errands at the selectmen's room was concerning the reduction of her taxes.

"I'm a-payin' too much on that leetle house," said she, standing up, alert and defiant. "It ain't wuth it." There was some dickering, but she gained her point. Poor Esther Gay would never make again her foolish little boast about her large tax. More than all her patient, toilsome knitting was the sacrifice of this bit of harmless vanity.

When she arrived at the Littles', Henry was out in the yard. He was very young; his innocent, awkward face flushed when he saw Esther coming up the path.

"Good arternoon," said she. Henry jerked his head.

"Your mother to home?"

"Ye—s."

Esther advanced and knocked, while Henry stood staring.

Presently Mrs. Little answered the knock. She was a large woman. The astonished young man saw his mother turn red in the face, and rear herself in order of battle, as it were, when she saw who her caller was; then he heard Esther speak.

"I'm a-comin' right to the p'int afore I come in," said she. "I've heard you said

you didn't want your son to marry my grand-daughter because you didn't like some things about me. Now, I want to know if you said it."

"Yes; I did," replied Mrs. Little, tremulous with agitation, red, and perspiring, but not weakening.

"Then you didn't have nothin' again' Hatty, you nor Henry? 'Twa'n't an excuse?"

"I ain't never had anything against the girl."

"Then I want to come in a minute. I've got somethin' I want to say to you, Mrs. Little."

"Well, you can come in—if you want to."

After Esther had entered, Henry stood looking wistfully at the windows. It seemed to him that he could not wait to know the reason of Esther's visit. He took things more soberly than Hatty; he had not lost his meals nor his sleep; still he had suffered. He was very fond of the girl, and he had a heart which was not easily diverted. It was hardly possible that he would ever die of grief, but it was quite possible that he might live long with a memory, young as he was.

When his mother escorted Esther to the

door, as she took leave, there was a marked difference in her manner. "Come again soon, Mis' Gay," he heard her say; "run up any time you feel like it, an' stay to tea. I'd really like to have you."

"Thank ye," said Esther, as she went down the steps. She had an aspect of sweetness about her which did not seem to mix well with herself.

When she reached home she found Hatty lying on the lounge. "How do you feel to-night?" said she, unpinning her shawl.

"Pretty well."

"You'd better go an' brush your hair an' change your dress. I've been over to Henry's an' seen his mother, an' I shouldn't wonder if he was over here to-night."

Hatty sat bolt upright and looked at her grandmother. "What do you mean?"

"What I say. I've been over to Mrs. Little's, an' we've had a talk. I guess she thought she'd been kind of silly to make such a fuss. I reasoned with her, an' I guess she saw I'd been more right about some things than she'd thought for. An' as far as goin' to meetin' an' knittin' Sundays is concerned—— Well, I don't s'pose I kin knit any more if I want to. I've been to see about it, an' Laviny Dodge is comin'

here Saturday, an' she's so bad with her rheumatiz that she can't move, an' I guess it'll be all I kin do to wait on her, without doin' much knittin'. Mebbe I kin git a few minutes evenin's, but I reckon 'twon't amount to much. Of course I couldn't go to meetin' if I wanted to. I couldn't leave Lavinia."

"Did she say he—was coming?"

"Yes; she said she shouldn't wonder if he was up."

The young man did come that evening, and Esther retired to her little bedroom early, and lay listening happily to the soft murmur of voices outside. Lavinia Dodge arrived Saturday. The next morning, when Hatty had gone to church, she called Esther. "I want to speak to you a minute," said she. "I want to know if—— Mr. Winter brought me over, and he married the Ball girl that's been in the post-office, you know, and some-thin' he said—— Esther Gay, I want to know if you're the one that's been sendin' that money to me and mother all along?"

Esther coloured, and turned to go. "I don't see why you think it's me."

"Esther, don't you go. I know 'twas; you can't say 'twa'n't."

"It wa'n't much, anyhow."

" 'Twas to us. It kept us goin' a good while longer. We never said anythin' about it. Mother was awful proud, you know, but I dunno what we should have done. Esther, how could you do it?"

" Oh, it wa'n't anythin'. It was extra money. I airn'd it."

" Knittin'?"

Esther jerked her head defiantly. The sick woman began to cry. " If I'd ha' known, I would ha' come. I wouldn't have said a word."

" Yes, you would, too. You was bound to stan' up for what you thought was right, jest as much as I was. Now, we've both stood up, an' it's all right. Don't you fret no more about it."

" To think——"

" Land sakes, don't cry. The tea's all steeped, and I'm goin' to bring you in a cup now."

Henry came that evening. About nine o'clock Esther got a pitcher and went down to the well to draw some water for the invalid. Her old joints were so tired and stiff that she could scarcely move. She had had a hard day. After she had filled her pitcher she stood resting for a moment, staring up at the bright sitting-room windows.

Henry and Hatty were in there: just a simple, awkward young pair, with nothing beautiful about them, save the spark of eternal nature, which had its own light. But they sat up stiffly and timidly in their two chairs, looking at each other with full content. They had glanced solemnly and bashfully at Esther when she passed through the room; she appeared not to see them.

Standing at the well, looking up at the windows, she chuckled softly to herself. "It's all settled right," said she, "an' there don't none of 'em suspect that I'm a-carryin' out my p'int arter all."

IN BUTTERFLY TIME.

"SEEMS to me the butterflies is dretful thick this season, Becca."

"Yes, they do seem to be consider'ble thick, mother."

"I never see 'em so thick. Thar's hull swarms on 'em : lots of them common yaller ones, an' leetle rusty red ones ; an' thar's some of them big spotted ones, ain't thar ? Near's I kin see through my specs, thar's one now a-settin' on that head of clover."

"Yes, there is one, mother."

"Thar's lots of grasshoppers too. The grasshoppers air a-risin' up around my feet, an' the butterflies air flyin' up in my face out of the flowers. Law, hev we got to the bars a'ready ? I hadn't no idee on 't. Be keerful about lettin' on 'em down, Becca."

The younger of the two old women let down the bars which separated the blooming field which they had been traversing from the road, and they passed through.

"S'pose you'd better put 'em up agin,

Becca, though thar ain't any need on 't, as I see. Thar ain't nothin' in the field to git out but the butterflies an' the grasshoppers, an' they 'll git out if they want to, whether or no. Let me take holt."

"There ain't any need of it, mother."

"Yes, I will, too, Becca Wheat. I'm jest as strong 'in my arms as ever I was. You ain't no call to think I ain't."

"I don't think so, mother; I know you're real strong."

"I allers was pretty strong to lift—stronger'n you."

The bars up, the two women kept on down the road. It was bordered by stone walls and flowering bushes. Ahead, just as far as they could see, was one white house. They were going there to a woman's prayer-meeting.

The older of the two kept a little ahead of the younger, trotting weakly through the short, dusty grass. Her small, old head in a black straw bonnet bobbed in time to every step; her sharp, yellow little face peeped out of the bonnet, alert and half aggressive. She wore a short black shawl tightly drawn over her narrow, wiry back, and held her hands folded primly in front over the two ends.

The other woman, her daughter, pacing dreamily behind, was taller and slenderer. Her face was pale and full, but slightly wrinkled, with a sweet, wide mouth. The pleasant expression about it was so decided that it was almost a smile. Her dress was slightly younger, a hat instead of a bonnet, and no shawl over her black calico afternoon dress.

As they drew nearer to the house the old woman peered anxiously ahead through her spectacles.

"See any one thar, Becca?"

"I should think two women jest went in. I couldn't tell who they was."

"You'd orter wear your spectacles, Becca; your eyesight ain't so good as mine was at your age. She's got her front room open for the meetin'. I kin see the curtains flappin'."

Quite a strong soft wind was blowing. As they went up the front walk between the phlox bushes with their purplish-pink heads, the green curtains with a flowery border swung out of the windows of Mrs. Thomas's best room, the one on the right of the front door.

The door stood open, and a mildly curious face or two showed through the windows.

"Thar's old Mis' Wheat an' Becca," said some one in a whisper to Mrs. Thomas, and she came to the door.

There was a solemn composure on her large, comfortable face. "Good afternoon, Mis' Wheat," said she; "good afternoon, Becca. Walk in."

They walked in with staid demeanour, and took their seats. The chairs were set close to the walls around the room. There were nine or ten women there with good, grave faces. One old woman sat close to the mantel-shelf, and Mrs. Wheat took a vacant chair beside her.

"How d'ye do, Mis' Dill?" whispered she, reaching out her little skinny hand.

The other shook it stiffly. She was as small as Mrs. Wheat, but her little face was round, and her chin had a square decision in its cut, instead of a sharp one. She had a clean, nicely-folded white handkerchief in her lap, and she wiped her spectacles carefully with it and looked through them at Mrs. Wheat before replying.

"I'm enjoyin' pretty good health jest now, thankee, Mis' Wheat," whispered she.

Mrs. Wheat's eyes snapped. "You do seem to be lookin' pretty middlin' for one of your age," said she.

Mrs. Dill gave a stony look at her.

The meeting began then. The good women read in the Bible and prayed, one after another, the others silent on their knees beside her. Their husbands and sons in the hay-fields, the children in the district school, the too light-minded though innocent village girls, the minister wrestling with his dull sermon faithfully in his shabby study, the whole world, were remembered in their homely petitions. The south wind sang in at the windows; a pine-tree around the corner of the house soughed; the locusts cried shrilly over in the blossoming fields; and their timid prayers went up.

Old Mrs. Wheat, in her corner, on her knees, listened with an outward show of reverence, but she was inwardly torn with jealousy. She was the last one called upon to take part; even old Mrs. Dill was preferred before her. But she had her revenge; when she did get her chance to speak, long and weary was the time she kept her devout sisters on their aching knees.

She had been storing up a good deal to say while the others were praying, and now she said it. For church and town and commonwealth, for missions at home and abroad, her shrill cry went up. Lastly she

prayed, with emphatic quavers, for old Mrs. Dill. "O Lord," pleaded she, "remember, we pray thee, this aged handmaiden at my side. May she long enjoy what blessing's are left to her in her age an' decrepitude. Sanctify her trials unto her, an' enable her to look away from the feebleness an' want of strength which is now her lot on this airth, to that better country where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary air at rest."

When the prayer was ended, Mrs. Dill rose softly from her knees and sat down. Her face was absolutely immovable as she met Mrs. Wheat's glance when the meeting dispersed.

The two old ladies were left alone in the best room for a little while. Mrs. Thomas, who was Mrs. Dill's daughter, wanted to see Becca about something, so she called her out into the sitting-room.

"You an' Mis' Wheat can visit a little while, while Becca an' I are out here," said she.

Mrs. Dill looked at her daughter when she said this, as if inclined to decline the proposal. Then an expression of stubborn fortitude came over her face, and she settled herself solidly in her chair.

The two looked primly at each other when they were left alone.

"How is Mis' Thomas?" said Mrs. Wheat; "and how is Adoniram?"

"They air both well, thank ye."

"I s'pose Adoniram is to work?"

"Hayin'."

"I thought I ketched a glimpse of him in the field over thar when I come in. Adoniram grows old, don't he?"

"I don't know."

"I sot lookin' at him in meetin' last Sabbath, an' thinkin' how dretfully he was altered. I hope he'll be spared to you as long as you live, Mis' Dill. It's consider'ble better on your account that he hain't never got married, ain't it?"

Mrs. Dill reddened, and stiffened her chin a little. "Thar's a good many folks don't git married, Mis' Wheat, men, an' women too, sometimes."

"Becca could 'a got married dozens of times, if she'd wanted to, Mis' Dill."

"I s'pose so."

"See here, Mis' Dill, s'pose we come to the p'int. You're allers kinder flingin' at me, an' I know well enough what it means. You've allers blamed me 'cause you thought I come betwixt my Becca an' your Adoniram, an' I didn't as I knows on."

"Oh no ; course you didn't."

"I s'pose you don't believe it, Mis' Dill?"

"No ; I ain't forgot how Adoniram come home from your house, jest about this time o' year, a matter o' forty year ago."

"I don't know what you mean."

Mrs. Dill sat up straight in her chair, and talked with slow emphasis. Her eyes never winked.

"Jest about this time in the afternoon, an' this time o' year, 'bout forty year ago, Adoniram come home from your house. They'd got the hay in the day before, so he had a leetle restin' spell, an' he went right over thar. I knowed where he'd gone well enough, though he made up an arrant after a rake to Deacon White's. I knowed he'd stop to Becca's before he got home. She'd been off visitin', an' he hadn't seen her for a week. She'd jest got home that mornin'. Well, Adoniram went, an' he come home. I was a-goin' through the front entry when he come in through the settin'-room. He was jest as pale as death. I asked him what the matter was, an' he wouldn't say nothin'. The door stood open in here, an' he come in an' dropped into a cheer by the table, an' put his head down on it. I coaxed an' coaxed, an' finally I got it out of him. He'd

been over to Becca's, an' you'd treated him so he couldn't ever go agin. He said you didn't like him, an' that was the end on 't. Becca couldn't go agin her mother's wishes, an' he wasn't ever goin' to ask her to. Adoniram had jest joined the church that spring, an' he'd jest as soon cut his hand off as to lead Becca to disobey her parents. He's allers had a strong feelin' that marriages made that way wa'n't blessed. I've heerd him say so a good many times. So——"

"I'd like to know what I ever did to mistreat Adoniram, Mis' Dill."

"He never told me the hull perticklars. Thar was somethin' 'bout a butterfly."

"Lor', I remember. 'Twa'n't nothin'—nothin' at all. Young folks air so silly! I remember jest as well as ef 'twas yister-day. Adoniram an' Becca was out in the yard in front of the house. Becca had it all laid out in flower-beds jest as it is now, an' thar was swarms of butterflies round 'em. They was out thar in the yard, an' I was in the settin'-room winder. They was kinder foolin', an' all of a sudden Adoniram he begun chasin' a butterfly. It was one of them great blue-spotted ones. He caught it mighty spry, an' was a givin' it to Becca, when I said somethin' out o' the

winder. I don't know jest what it was. I thought 'twas dretful silly for him to waste his time ketchin' butterflies, an' Becca had some sewin' I wanted her to do. I s'pose 'twas somethin' 'bout that."

"You didn't think Adoniram was good enough for Becca; that was the hull on 't."

"That wa'n't it, Mis' Dill. I don't see how you come to think such a thing."

"You'd jest set your heart on havin' her git that rich Arms feller; you know you had. But she didn't; she didn't git anybody."

Mrs. Dill's thin voice quavered and shook, and her little bony form trembled all over, but the spirit within her manifested itself bravely through shakes and quavers.

"You air misjudgin' of me, Mis' Dill, an' you ain't showin' a Christian spirit. You'll be sorry for it when you come to think it over. You'll see 'twas all jest the way I said 'twas, an' I didn't mean nothin'. Let alone anything else, it's awful cruel to ketch butterflies; you know that, Mis' Dill."

"You've done a crueller thing than ketchin' butterflies, Martha Wheat."

"Well, Mis' Dill, we'd better not talk bout this any longer. 'Tain't jest becomin'

after the meetin' we've jest had to git to disputin'. Thar's Becca."

Going home along the green-bordered road and across the flowery field, Rebecca Wheat noticed that something seemed to have disturbed her mother. The nervous old woman fretted and fidgeted. In the middle of the field she stopped short, and almost danced up and down with feeble, childish wrath.

"Why, what is the matter, mother?"

"Them pesky butterflies!" ejaculated her mother, waving her trembling hands. "I'd like to poison their honey for 'em."

"Let me go on ahead, mother; then they won't bother you so much. I kin kinder brush them away."

"Well, you may, ef you're a mind ter. Say, Becca—speakin' of butterflies brings it to mind. You never thought I was ter blame 'bout separatin' you an' Adoniram Dill, did you?"

The old daughter looked pleasantly into her old mother's face. "I didn't blame anybody, mother. I didn't think you used to like Adoniram very well; but it's all over now."

"You didn't take it to heart much, did you, Becca?"

"Not enough to hurt me any, I guess.

Do you mind the butterflies so much with me ahead?"

"No, I guess I don't. I've kinder been thinkin' on't over lately, an' ef I was kinder sharp 'bout that butterfly business, an' hindered you an' Adoniram's makin' a match on 't, I ain't above sayin' I might hev been a leetle more keerful. Adoniram's turned out pretty well. Mis' Higgins told me yisterday that he'd jest bought that ten-acre lot of Deacon White's. I guess he must hev been layin' up money. Well, Becca, I dessay you air better off than you would be ef you'd been married. It's pretty resky."

Rebecca, plodding before her mother, looked ahead at the familiar landscape, with that expression of strong, pleasant patience which the years seemed to have brought out in relief on her face, like the chasing on silver. It made her more attractive than she had been in her youth, for she had never been pretty.

She and her mother reached the comfortable house, with three great elms in front of it, where they lived, two hours before sunset.

About an hour later Adoniram Dill also went home from his labour across the fields. He was a tall, muscular old man, with a

strong-featured, beardless face. He was so straight and agile that he looked, the width of a field away, like a young man. When he came nearer, one saw his iron-grey hair, the deep seams, and the old brown tint of his face, with a start of surprise.

Supper was not quite ready, so after he had washed his face and hands at the kitchen sink he went into the sitting-room, and sat down in a calico-covered rocking-chair with a newspaper. His mother looked in presently, and saw him there.

She stood in the entry-door and beckoned him solemnly. "Come into the parlour a minute," she whispered; "I've got some-
thin' I want to tell you, an' the children will be racin' in here."

Adoniram rose and followed her in obediently.

She shut the parlour door and looked round at him. "Adoniram, what do you think? Mis' Wheat was over to the meetin' this arternoon, and she an' me hed a little talk arter the others was gone, an' she brought up that old affair of you an' Becca agin."

"There ain't any use bringin' it up, mother."

"She says she didn't mean a thing when

she talked to you so about that butterfly business. She jest thought you hadn't orter be wastin' your time doin' sech cruel things as ketchin' butterflies, an' she wanted Becca to come in an' do some sewin'. That's what she said. I let her know I didn't believe a word on't. I told her right to her face that she thought you wa'n't good enough for Becca, an' she wanted her to hev that rich Arms feller."

"Seems to me I'd have let it all gone, mother."

"I war'n't goin' to let it all go, Adoniram. I'm slow-spoken, an' I don't often speak, but once in a while I've got to. She's the most aggervatin'—I don't know what you would hev done with her ef you hed merried Becca. You'd hed to hev her arter Mr. Wheat died. She 'ain't never liked me. She tried to be dretful nice to me to-day, 'cause she'd got an axe to grind; but she'd got so much spite in her she couldn't help it showin' out a leetle. Why, she kerried it into the prayer-meetin', she did, Adoniram. She *prayed* for me, 'cause I was so old an' broken down, an' she's three year older'n me. I think it's awful to show out that way in a prayer-meetin'."

"P'rhaps she didn't mean anything."

"Yes, she did. I knew jest what she meant by the hull on't, Adoniram Dill. She's got kinder sick livin' thar alone with Becca, without any man to split up kindlin'-wood an' bring in water, an' she's tryin' to git you back agin. She jest the same as said she hedn't no objections to it. I guess she thinks you've been doin' pretty well, too. She thinks it would be a mighty nice thing now to hev you step in thar with your money an' wait on 'em. I see through her."

"P'rhaps it ain't so, mother."

"Yes, 'tis. Adoniram Dill, you don't mean to say you'd hev any idee of marryin' Becca Wheat, arter you've been treated as you hev?"

"You 'ain't heard me say any such thing, mother."

"I thought you looked kinder queer. You wouldn't, would you, Adoniram?"

"Not if it didn't seem for—the best. I don't—know."

All of a sudden Adoniram Dill sat down beside the little parlour table and leaned his head on it as he had forty years ago.

"What's the matter?" his mother asked, with a scared start, looking at him with awed eyes. It was almost like a coming back of the dead, this rising of her son's youth from

its snowy and grassy grave in her sight. "O Adoniram, you poor boy, you 'ain't felt jest the same way about her all these years? It's awful. I hadn't any idee on 't."

"Never mind, mother. Jane's callin' us to supper; you go right along, an' I'll come in a minute."

"Thar ain't any need of your havin' any more frettin' about it, anyhow, Adoniram. Her mother's willin', an' I 'ain't a doubt but Becca is. I've seen her look kinder down-hearted sometimes; for all she's so good an uncomplainin', I guess she's been worried as well as some other folks. You jest slick up arter supper, an' go right over an' ask her. Thar ain't no reason at all why you shouldn't. You ain't nuther of you so very old, not more'n sixty. An' I don't know as Mis' Wheat'll be so very bad to git along with. I dessay she's meant all right."

Adoniram said nothing. He rose with an effort, and went out to supper with his mother, who kept gazing at him with loving, questioning eyes.

"Ain't you goin'?" she whispered when they were in the sitting-room again.

"I guess not to-night, mother."

"Well, mebbe 'tis jest as well to wait till

to-morrer. I don't want Mis' Wheat to think you was in too much of a rush."

After his mother had gone to bed, and out of doors the summer night was complete with all its stars, he sat down alone on the front door-step, and thought. He felt like a wanderer returned to some beautiful, dear country, the true home of his heart, which he had thought to never see again. To-night the golden gates of youth swung open with sweet music for Adoniram Dill, with his grey locks and his hard, seamed face, and he entered in, never knowing he was any different.

The steadiness with which he had kept to his ideas of duty for the last forty years gave his happiness, now that the long strain was over, an almost unearthly, holy character. It was truly the reward of virtue. The faithful old man who had taken what he considered to be the right course for himself and the woman he loved, without question or appeal to that mandate of obedience which he read so literally, was capable at sixty of being as freely happy as a child.

The sordid motives which had possibly actuated Becca's mother to withdraw her opposition at last did not fret him at all. He was far above it. That hard, shrill voice

which had rung out of that sitting-room window for him for the last forty years was still. The voice had truly said cruel things, more cruel than its owner would own to now. The poor, honest young man had gone away that day with the full and settled understanding that his sweetheart's mother was bitterly opposed to him, and that must be the end of it all. He never dreamed of such a thing as urging her to marry him without her mother's consent.

So he had never been since in that front yard, full of roses and pinks and butterflies.

He and Rebecca had met in the village society like kindly acquaintances for all these years.

Adoniram, looking across the little country church Sunday after Sunday as the years went on, might have seen the woman growing old who should have grown old by his side, with bitter regret, and Rebecca, with patient sadness, have marked his entrance among all the congregation ; but no one had known.

The day after the meeting Adoniram had to drive over to the store on business. On his way back he passed a house where an aged sister of Mrs. Wheat's lived, and saw,

with a start, the latter's thin face at a window. "I wonder if Becca's home?" said he. Then he drove on quicker, with a gathering resolution.

About four o'clock he was going across lots through the field towards the Wheats'. He had on his Sunday coat. When about half-way across he saw a woman's figure approaching. Soon he saw it was Rebecca. He stood in the narrow footpath, between the tall clover and daisies and herd's-grass which came up to his knees, and waited.

She greeted him, when she reached him, in her usual good, placid way. "How do you do, Mr. Dill?"

"I was comin' to see you, Becca."

She looked at him, and the calm lines in her face changed a little. "I'll go back. I was going after mother, that was all; but she won't be in any hurry."

"No, there ain't any need of your goin' back. I can say what I wanted to jest as well here, an' then you can keep right on after your mother. Becca, supposin' 'twas forty year ago, an' you an' me was here, an' your mother was willin', what would you say ef I asked you to marry me?"

Great tears stood in her eyes. "Oh Adoniram, it wouldn't be fair!"

"Don't you think your mother would be willin'?"

"I don't think she's so set agin it as she was, but 'twouldn't be fair. I'm sixty year old, Adoniram."

"So'm I, Becca."

She shook her head. "No, Adoniram, it ain't any use. It might have been different once. Now, after all this time, when I'm old an' broken down, an' the fault of all the trouble on my side of the house, I ain't goin' to be so mean as to let you marry me. It ain't fair."

Adoniram gave one step forward, and caught his old sweetheart in his arms. "I've been waitin' for you forty year, Becca, an' there ain't nothin' more comin' betwixt us. Don't you say anything more about its not bein' fair."

"You know mother'll hev to live with us."

"I'll try an' make her jest as happy as I can."

The clover and the grasses rustled in the wind, and the butterflies came flying around the old man and his old sweetheart standing there. It would have made no difference to them if they had been waiting in their little chrysalis coffins a hundred years or so, they were butterflies now. There were yellow

ones and little rusty red ones, and now and then a gorgeous large one with blue spots on his black wings. Seeing one of these made Adoniram remember something swiftly.

"Want me to ketch a butterfly for you, Becca?"

"I've got one now you caught forty year ago."

AN UNWILLING GUEST.

“ I ’VE been lookin’ in the pantry, an’ you ’ain’t got a bit of cake in the house. I’m goin’ to work an’ make you a good loaf of cup-cake before I go home.”

“ Oh ! I wouldn’t, Mis’ Steele ; it’ll be too much work.”

“ Work ! I guess I ain’t quite so feeble but I can make a loaf of cup-cake.”

“ You ’ve got on your nice silk dress.”

“ H’m ! I ain’t afraid of this old silk. Where’s the eggs ? ”

“ There ain’t a bit of need of our havin’ any cake—Lawson an’ me don’t eat much cake, anyway. Besides, he can make it.”

“ Guess he ’ain’t much time to make cake whilst he’s plantin’. Besides, ’twould drive me crazy to have a man messin’ round. Where’ll I find some eggs ? ”

“ I don’t believe there’s any in the house. You’re real good to offer, Mis’ Steele, but I don’t believe there’s any need on’t.”

“ Where’d the eggs be if there was any in the house ? ”

"I guess he keeps 'em in a little brown basket in front of the window in the pantry."

"Here's the basket, but there ain't any eggs in it. Don't you s'pose I could find some out in the barn?"

"You don't want to go huntin' round in the barn with that good dress on."

"Guess I sha'n't hurt it any."

Mrs. Steele stalked out of the room, the little basket dangling from her hand. Her black-silk dress rattled, and her new, shiny shoes creaked. She had on some jingling chains and bracelets, and long gold ear-rings with little balls attached, which swung and bobbed and tinkled as she walked.

Susan Lawson, at the window, could not see her, as she was faced the other way, but she listened to the noise of her departure. She heard two doors slam, and the creaking steps very faint in the distance.

"Oh dear!" said she. She pressed her lips together and leaned her head back. The clock ticked loud; a sunbeam, with a broad slant of dancing motes in it, streamed in the window. Susan's old face looked like porcelain in the strong light, which seemed to almost shine through it. Her skin was thin and clear, and stretched

tightly over the delicate face-bones. There was a faint pink on the cheeks.

"Oh dear!" she said, the second time, when she heard the creaking footsteps nearer and louder. "Did you find the eggs?" asked she meekly, when the door opened.

"Yes, I found the eggs, an' I found somethin' else. For pity's sake, Susan, what does Lawson mean by havin' so many cats in that barn?"

"I know it. I've said all I could to have him get rid of some of 'em."

"Well, I guess I'd say, an' keep a-sayin', till he did. I don't believe I'm stretchin' it a mite when I say I saw fifty out there just now. I hadn't any more'n shut the sink-room door before the evilest-lookin' black cat I ever saw popped its head out of a hole in the wall. Then I went a few steps further, an' two or three scud like a whirlwind right under my feet. Much as half a dozen flew out of one corner when I went in to look for eggs. I declare I thought they'd scratch my eyes out; I was actually afraid of 'em. They were as black as minks, and they had the greenest eyes! The barn's alive with 'em. I don't see what Lawson's thinkin' of."

"I know there's a lot; there was the last of my bein' about, when I used to go out there, an' I s'pose there's more now."

"Why don't Lawson kill some of 'em?"

"I've talked to him about it till I've got tired of it. Two years ago he did get so far's to load the gun one afternoon an' go out in the barn. But I listened, an' it didn't go off. I guess he was kinder afraid on't; to tell the truth, he don't know much about fire-arms."

"Well, if I was a man, an' couldn't fire a gun, I wouldn't tell of it. I'd risk it, but I could shoot some of them cats. I guess my barn wouldn't be overrun with 'em if I knew it."

Mrs. Steele carried the eggs into the pantry; then she came back with a resolute look on her large face with its beetling nose.

"Where is that gun?" asked she.

"O Mis' Steele, you don't——"

"I ain't goin' to have you so overrun with cats if I can help it. If Lawson can't fire a gun, I can. The amount of it is, if one cat's killed, the rest'll leave, and I'll risk it but I can hit one. I ain't afraid to try, anyhow. Where's the gun?"

Susan turned white. "O Mis' Steele, don't!"

"Where's the gun?"

"You'll get killed. Oh, you will! you will! Don't—please don't."

"Get killed! I should laugh. What do you s'pose I'm goin' to do—point it at myself instead of the cat? Where is it?"

Mrs. Steele stood in front of the other woman, her large, short-waisted figure, in its smooth, shiny black silk, thrown back majestically on her heels, and looked at her imperiously.

Susan felt as if her answer were a thread, and Mrs. Steele had a firm clutch on it, and was pulling it surely out of her soul. She had to let it go.

"It's in the back chamber," said she. "Oh, don't!"

"You just sit still, an' not worry."

Susan clutched the arms of her chair with her little bony hands, and sat listening. She heard the footsteps on the back stairs, ascending and descending, then, after an interval of agonised suspense, the sharp report of the gun.

Her heart beat so heavily that it made her tremble all over. She sat thus, her poor little house of life all ajar with the heavy working of its enginery, and waited. Two, three minutes passed, and Mrs. Steele did

not come. Five minutes passed. Susan began to scream: "Mis' Steele, O Mis' Steele, are you killed? Mis' Steele, answer! Why don't you answer? Mis' Steele, are you killed? Oh! oh! Here I am, an' can't stir a step; p'rhaps she's bleedin' to death out there. Oh, where's Lawson? Lawson! Lawson! come—come quick! Mis' Steele's killed! Mis' Steele! Mis' Steele!"

"Susan Lawson, what are you hollerin' so for?" said Mrs. Steele suddenly. Susan had not heard her enter amid her frantic outcries.

"O Mis' Steele, you ain't killed?" she said faintly.

"Killed? I'd laugh if I couldn't shoot a cat without gettin' killed. What have you gone an' got into such a stew for?"

"You was so long!"

"I thought p'rhaps I'd get aim at another, but I didn't."

"Did you kill one?"

"I guess so. She ran, but I guess she was hurt pretty bad."

Susan peered round at her. "Why, you look awful white, Mis' Steele. You ain't hurt, are you?" Susan was shivering now so that she could scarcely speak. Her eyes looked wild; her thin lips were parted, and she panted between her words.

"Hurt, no; how should I be hurt? I've been lookin' kinder pale for a few days, anyway; quite a number's spoke of it."

"Why, Mis' Steele, what's that on your dress?"

"What?"

"All over the back of it. Why, Mis' Steele, you're all covered with dust. Where hev you been? Come up here, an' let me brush it off. There's hay-seed, too. It's too bad—on this nice dress."

"Land! I guess 'twon't hurt it any. I must ha' rubbed against something out in the barn. That's enough. I'm goin' to put my shawl on, an' that will cover it up. I'll take it off an' give it a good cleanin' when I get home. Come to think it over, I don't know 's I'd better stop to make that cake to-night, if you don't care much about it. I'll come over an' do it to-morrow. It's a little later than I thought for, an' I've got to bake bread for supper."

"I wouldn't stop, Mis' Steele. It ain't any matter about the cake, nohow."

"She goes kinder stiff," thought Susan, watching Mrs. Steele in her black silk and cashmere long shawl going out of the yard. "How beautiful an' green the grass is gettin'! I'm thankful she wa'n't hurt."

In the course of half an hour Jonas Lawson, Susan's husband, came up from the garden, where he had been planting pease. The woman at the window watched the tall, soberly moving figure. The broad yard was covered with the most beautiful spring grass, and the dandelions were just beginning to blossom. Susan watched her husband's spreading feet anxiously. "There! he's stepped on that dandelion; I knew he would," said she.

Lawson opened the door slowly and entered. "Who was it fired a gun a little while ago?" said he. His arms hung straight at his sides, his long face was deeply furrowed, the furrows all running up and down. He dropped his lower jaw a good deal when he spoke, and his straight black beard seemed to elongate.

"O Lawson, it was Mis' Steele. She skeered me 'most to death."

Lawson stood listening to the story. "The gun kicked, most likely," said he soberly, when Susan mentioned the dust on Mrs. Steele's black silk. "It's apt to. It ain't a very safe gun; I'm 'most afraid of it myself. I reckon she got knocked over."

"Oh dear! do you suppose it hurt her much, Lawson?"

"Shouldn't be surprised if she was pretty lame to-morrow."

"Oh dear! I wish she hadn't touched it."

"I heard the gun, an' I thought I'd come up as soon as I got that row of pease planted, an' see if there was anythin' the matter. I knew you couldn't do nothin' to help yourself, if anybody was to kill you."

Lawson plodded about, getting tea ready. Susan had been unable to walk for several years, and all the domestic duties had devolved upon him. She had taught him how to cook, and he did fairly well, although he was extremely slow and painstaking. Susan had been very quick herself, and sometimes it fretted her to watch him.

"It took him jest three hours and a half to make a pan of ginger-bread this mornin'," she told Mrs. Steele one day. "It was real good, but it seemed as if I should fly, seein' him do it. He measured the flour over ten times—I counted." She was all of a nervous quiver telling it.

Nobody knew the real magnitude of the trial which the poor vivacious soul had to bear, sitting there in her calico-covered rocker, with her stiff feet on a little wooden stool, from morning till night, day after day.

She fluttered and beat under Providence as a bird would under a man's hand ; but she was held down relentlessly in that chair, and would be till the beating and fluttering stopped.

Lawson turned her chair about, as was the custom, that she might watch him preparing the meal.

He spread the cover on the table and placed the plates ; then he was in the pantry a long time fumbling about.

"What are you doing, Lawson?" Susan asked, trying to peer around the corner.

"I—can't seem to see the knives anywhere. It's curious. I allers put 'em in one place."

"Ain't they in the knife-box?"

"They—appear to be gone, box and all." Lawson spoke in a tone of grave perplexity, and fumbled on.

"Ain't you found 'em yet!"

"No, I—don't seem to see 'em yet. It's curious."

"Oh dear ! push me in there, an' let me see if I can't see 'em. Mis' Steele came in here an' righted up things," said Susan, after sitting in the pantry and staring vainly at the shelves ; "she must have put 'em somewhere else."

They spread their bread-and-butter with Lawson's jack-knife that night.

"Mis' Steele means real well," said Lawson, labouring with the narrow blade, "but it seems as if she kinder upsets things sometimes."

"I ain't goin' to hear a word again' Mis' Steele. She put 'em up somewhere; they're safe enough."

"Oh, I ain't no doubt of it, Susan; we'll come across 'em. I don't mean a thing again' Mis' Steele."

Lawson, after he had cleared away the tea things, fumbled again in the pantry.

"What are you huntin' for now?" Susan called out.

"Nothin' but my shavin' things. I don't seem to see 'em. It's curious."

"Ain't they in the corner of the top shelf, where they allers are?"

"I don't seem to see 'em there. I guess mebbe Mis' Steele set 'em somewhere else. It ain't no matter. I was kinder thinkin' of shavin' an' goin' to meetin', but mebbe it's jest as well I didn't. I feel kinder stiff to-night."

"Seems as if you ought to go to meetin'. You're sure they ain't right there?"

"I don't see 'em. I guess Mis' Steele

must ha' put 'em up. Well, it don't make no odds."

Lawson sat down and read the paper.

The next day Mrs. Steele came over, and revealed the knives and the shaving apparatus in the top drawer of a bureau in the kitchen.

"There wa'n't nothin' in there," said she, "an' I thought you could use it for a kind of sideboard."

That day Mrs. Steele made the cup-cake and broached a plan.

"You be ready, Susan," said she, standing with her bonnet and shawl on, taking leave; "I'm comin' over with the horse an' wagon to-morrow, to take you to my house."

"Oh no, Mis' Steele!"

"You needn't say a word. You're comin', an' you're goin' to make me a good long visit."

"Oh, I can't!"

"Can't? I don't see any reason why you can't."

"I can't leave Lawson."

"Goodness! if Lawson can't take care of himself six weeks, I should think 'twas a pity."

"O Mis' Steele, I couldn't stay six weeks!"

"Don't you say another word about it. I'm comin' over to-morrow, an' you be ready."

"I couldn't git into the wagon."

"Me an' Lawson can lift you in. Don't you say a word. You ain't goin' to sit in that chair without any change a day longer, if I can help it. You be ready."

"O Mis' Steele."

But she was out in the yard, looking back at the window, and nodding emphatically.

When Lawson came in from his planting he found Susan crying.

"What's the matter? ain't you feelin' as well as common to-day?" he inquired, with long-drawn concern.

"O Lawson, what do you think? Mis' Steele's comin' over with her horse an' covered wagon to-morrow, an' take me over to her house, and keep me six weeks."

"Don't you feel as if you wanted to go?" Lawson said, with a look of slow wonder.

"I'm scared to death. You don't think about it; nobody thinks nothin' about it: how I've been sittin' here in this house nigh on to ten year, an' what an awful thing it is for me to think of goin' out of it."

"Don't you feel as if it might do you good?"

AN UNWILLING GUEST.

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"Good! I've been lookin' at that grass out there. I feel as if I'd stayed in this house so long that I'm rooted, jest as the grass is in the yard. An' now they're goin' to take me up root an' all, an' I'm only a poor little old worn-out woman, an' I can't stan' it; I—can't—stan' it!" Susan sobbed hysterically.

"It seems to me, I'd tell her I couldn't come, if I felt so about it," said Lawson, his face lengthening, and the long furrows in it.

"There's them lilacs an' them flowerin' almonds gettin' ready to blow under the window here. An' the yard's greener than I ever see it this time o' year."

"The grass round Mis' Steele's place is uncommon forrard; I noticed it goin' by there the other day."

"What do you s'pose I care about her grass? You can't git along alone, Lawson, neither."

"Oh, I shall do well enough! I can make me some pies."

"Yes, you won't make a thing but mince-pies, an' git sick, I'll warrant."

"I was calculatin' to make some apple-pies."

"Mis' Steele made some cup-cake to-day, an' I expect nothin' but that'll make you

sick, now I'm goin' away. It's rich. She put a cup of butter and two whole cups of sugar in it. I didn't know how to have her, butter's so high, but I couldn't say nothin'. She was real good to do it."

In the night Susan aroused Lawson; she had thought of another tribulation connected with her prospective visit.

"Lawson," said she, "I've thought of somethin' else. I can't go, nohow."

"What is it?" asked Lawson, with his usual steady gravity—not even his sudden awakening could alter that.

"I 'ain't got a bonnet that's fit to wear. I 'ain't been out to meetin' for ten year, you know; an' I 'ain't hed a sign of a bonnet for all that time."

"Is the one you hed when you was taken sick worn out?"

"Worn out? No; but it don't look nothin' like the bonnets they wear nowadays. It's as flat as a saucer, an' Mis' Steele's is high in front as a steeple. I ain't goin' to ride through the town in such a lookin' thing. I've got some pride left."

But for all poor Susan Lawson's little feminine pride concerning attire, for all her valid excuses and her tearful, sleepless night, she went. She tied on nervously the flat

Neapolitan bonnet, with its little tuft of feathery green grass, which had flourished bravely in some old millinery spring; the strings also were grass green.

Lawson and Mrs. Steele carried her out between them in her chair. Poor Susan in her old bonnet, coming out into the sweet spring world, was like the feeble blossoming of some ancient rose which had missed the full glory of the resurrection. The spring, which one thinks of as an angel, was the same, but the rose and the old woman were different. The old woman felt the difference, if the rose did not.

"Oh, dear! I ain't what I used to be," she groaned, as they hoisted her, all trembling with fear, into the wagon. "I can't do as I used to, an' my bonnet is all behind the times."

Mrs. Steele's vehicle was a "covered wagon." There was no opening except in front; the black curtains buttoned closely over the back and sides. Susan sat, every nerve rigid, on the glossy back seat, and clutched the one in front firmly. Mrs. Steele sat there driving in a masterly way, holding the lines high and taut, her shoulders thrown back. The horse had been, though he was not now, a spirited animal.

Years ago a long stable at the right of Mrs. Steele's house had been well filled with horses. Mr. Steele had been an extensive dealer in them, and had thus acquired the wealth which his widow now enjoyed. She had always been well conversant with her husband's business, and now she liked to talk wisely about horses, though she had only one of their noble stock left.

"Ain't you afraid, Mis' Steele?" Susan kept asking nervously.

"Afraid! Why, I've drove this horse ever since John died."

"Then you're used to him?"

"I should hope I was. He's rather smart, but he's a pretty fair horse. He's been a little lame lately, but he's gettin' over it all right. He interfered goin' down that steep hill by Sam Basset's one time, last February, an' hurt him. Two year ago I thought he had a spavin, but it didn't amount to nothin'. John always thought a good deal of this horse; he valued him pretty high."

Susan looked with her wide, wondering eyes at a small galled spot on the horse's back, and thought innocently that that was the fraudulent spavin.

She watched timorously every motion of

the animal, and felt such a glad sense of safety that she did not repine, as she had expected, when she was carried over Mrs. Steele's threshold by Mrs. Steele and her hired man.

But the repining came. Susan was quite prostrated from her unusual exertion, and had to lie in bed for several days. Stretched out there in Mrs. Steele's unfamiliar bedroom, staring at the unfamiliar walls, that terrible, anticipated home-sickness attacked her.

"I don't want you to think I ain't grateful," she told Mrs. Steele, who found her crying one day, "but I do kinder wish, if I'm goin' to be sick, that I was to home in my own bed."

"You ain't goin' to be sick," pronounced Mrs. Steele, with cheerful alacrity; "an' if you was, you're a good deal better off here."

In a few days Susan was able to sit up. Mrs. Steele arranged her complacently in a stuffed easy-chair beside her sitting-room window.

"There, Harrison," she told her hired man that night, "that poor soul in there is goin' to take a little comfort for a few weeks, if I can bring it about."

Harrison Adams, the hired man, had come

into the service of the Steeles in his boyhood. Now he was married, and lived at a short distance ; but he still carried on the farm for Mrs. Steele. She was not a woman to live idly. She could not deal in horses, but she could make a few acres profitable, and she did.

This man was all the servant she kept. She managed her house herself. She was a fine cook, and Susan, during her visit, could complain of no lack of good living. The house was comfortable, too ; indeed, it was grand compared with the guest's own domicile.

But all this made no impression on Susan. The truth was that she had become so accustomed to her own poor little pebbles, and loved them so, that she thought they were diamonds.

Seated there in Mrs. Steele's soft easy-chair, she would sigh regretfully for her hard creaking rocker at home. She tasted Mrs. Steele's rich food, and longed for some of Lawson's cooking. She looked out of that pleasant front window on the broad road, with the spring garlands flinging over it and the people passing, and muttered, "It ain't half so pleasant as my window to home." Mrs. Steele's fine sitting-room, with its

brave Brussels and its springy hair-cloth, what was it to her own beloved kitchen, with the bureau in the corner, the table and stove and yellow chairs, and its voice—the clock?

On the morning of the day when the six weeks were up, Susan woke in a tumult of joyful anticipation. Nothing was said, but she supposed that her going home that day was an understood thing. So, after breakfast, she sat waiting for her hostess to mention it. Mrs. Steele was busy in the kitchen all the morning; the sweet, rich smell of baking cake floated into the sitting-room.

"Mebbe she thinks we'd better not go till afternoon; she seems pretty busy," Susan thought patiently.

But when the afternoon was spinning out, and Mrs. Steele sat sewing and said nothing, Susan's heart sank.

"Mis' Steele," she said timidly, "don't you think we'd better go before much later? I'm afraid it'll be growin' damp."

"Go where?"

"Why, go home."

"Go home?"

"Why, I thought I was goin' home to-day; it's six weeks since I came."

"Oh, you ain't goin' home yet a while;

you're goin' to stay till you get better. Your visit ain't half out yet."

"O Mis' Steele, you're real good, but I feel as if I must git home."

"Now, Susan Lawson, I should like to know what earthly reason you have for wantin' to go home. You can't do nothin' when you get there."

"I feel as if I'd oughter get home. I've left Lawson a long spell now."

"Nonsense!—a man that can cook as well as he can!"

"He won't make nothin' but mince-pies, an' get sick."

"I didn't see but he looked well enough when he was here last week. You ain't goin', so don't you say another word about it. You're goin' to stay here, where you can be took care of an' have things as you'd ought to."

"You're real good, Mis' Steele."

Susan turned her face towards the window. There were tears in her eyes, and she saw the trees all wavering; the grassy front yard seemed to undulate.

Mrs. Steele watched her sharply. "I declare I'm 'most mad with her!" she said to herself when she went into the kitchen to

get tea. "Seems as if anybody might know when they was well off."

June came, and poor Susan Lawson still visited. Her timid entreaties and mild protests had availed nothing against Mrs. Steele's determined kindness. Once she had appealed to Lawson, but that had been fruitless.

"She doesn't want to go," Mrs. Steele had assured him, following him to the door. "She'll be all off the notion of it to-morrow. Don't you do nothin' about it."

"Well, jest as you say, Mis' Steele," Lawson had replied, and gone home undisturbedly and eaten his solitary pie for tea.

In the second week of June, on Sunday afternoon, Susan was all alone in the house. Mrs. Steele had gone to church. It was a lovely day. The June roses were in blossom; there were clumps of them in the front yard. Susan, at her window, poked her head out into the sweet air, and stared about.

This poor old troubled face at the window, and the beautiful day armed against grief with roses and honey and songs, confronted each other.

Then the old woman began complaining, as if to the other.

"Oh," she muttered, "there's roses and everything. It's summer, an' I ain't to home yet. I'm a poor old woman, that's what I am—a poor old woman with a longin' to get home, an' no legs. Oh, what shall I do? Oh dear! oh dear me!"

Harrison Adams came strolling up the road. He was not a constant church-goer. Susan eyed his swinging arms in their clean white Sunday shirt-sleeves, and his dark red face with its sun-bleached blond moustache.

"Harrison!" she called. Her voice quavered out shrilly. "Won't you please come up to the window a minute?" she cried out again, when he stopped and looked around inquiringly.

"Anything wrong?" he asked, standing under the window and smiling.

"I want you to harness up an' take me home."

"Why, Mis' Steele's got the horse," the young man said, staring at her.

"Can't you git one somewhere—can't you?"

"Why, Mis' Steele'll carry you when she gets home. 'Twon't be more 'n half an hour."

"No, she won't—she won't!" Susan's voice rose into a wail. "She won't; an' I want to go home."

"Why, she would if you asked her—wouldn't she?" Harrison looked at her apprehensively. He began to think there was something wrong with her head.

"I've asked an' asked her."

"Well, I should think it was pretty work if she wouldn't let you go home when you wanted to."

"Mis' Steele means all right. I ain't goin' to hear a word again' her. She's done everything for me, an' more, too; but she don't know how gold ain't yaller an' honey ain't sweet when anybody's away from home and wantin' to be there. She means all right."

"Well, I don' know but she does; but it seems pretty hard lines if you can't go home when you want to," said the young fellow, growing indignant and sympathetic.

"Can't you git me home somehow? I've got to git home; I can't stan' it any longer. It seems as if I should die." She began sobbing.

Harrison stood looking at her; her little frail, quivering shoulders, her head with its thin, yellow-grey hair, her narrow, knotty hands, which covered her poor weeping face, her peaked elbows, which seemed pricking through the sleeves, those pitiful.

stiff, helpless feet on the cricket. Before this young man, with all his nerves and muscles, all his body-servants ready to obey joyfully and strongly his commands, this woman seemed like a little appealing skeleton, who, deprived of her own physical powers, and left stranded in an element where they were necessary, besought the assistance of his.

"I don't know," said he. "I'm perfectly willin' to carry you home, if we can fix it. But you see the horse is gone."

"Ain't there another you can git?"

"Nobody's but White's over there. They've gone to meetin', but I can get into the barn, I guess. But I don' know 'bout takin' you with him. He's an awful smart horse, jumpin' at everything. They don't drive him to meetin' because the women-folks are so scared of him. He ran away last spring, an' one of the boys was throwed out an' had his arm broke. I ain't afraid but what I can hold him, but you might get uneasy."

"I ain't afraid. Harness him up quick."

"Well, I'll do just as you say. I can hold him fast enough, an' there ain't any danger really. I'll go an' see if I can get into the barn."

"Hurry, or she'll be home."

That black, plunging horse had to be securely tied to the stone post while Harrison lifted Susan in. Then he unfastened him and sprang for his life to the seat. Then they flew.

"Don't you be afraid, Mis' Lawson," said Harrison, the veins swelling out on his forehead, his extended arms like steel. "I can hold him."

"I ain't afraid."

Harrison glanced at her. That old wasted face looked above fear. Her eyes were fixed ahead, and rapt.

"You're pretty spunky," said he.

"I've allers been scared of horses, but I'm goin' home now, an' I don't care for nothin' else."

The horse was somewhat subdued by the time they reached the Lawson place.

Susan gave a cry of rapture when they came in sight of it. Then she leaned forward and looked. Just a low, poorly-kept cottage, with a grassy yard sloping to the road to the ordinary eye; but no one knew, no mortal could ever know, what that poor homesick soul saw there.

As they drove into the yard one of the black cats peered around the open door of the barn; her wild green eyes shone.

"How bright that cat looks!" said Susan admiringly.

Presently Lawson opened the side door. He had an apron on, and his hands were white with flour.

"O Lawson, I've got home!"

"I was jest makin' a few apple-pies," said he, going out to the buggy. "I don't calculate to do such things Sunday, but I was drove yesterday, hayin', an' I got short. How do you do, Susan?"

When Susan was safely in the kitchen, seated in her old beloved chair, she leaned her head back, and closed her eyes with a happy sigh. "Oh!" she said, "I 'ain't never set in a chair so easy as this!"

Lawson stood looking uneasily at a bowl on the table. "I reckon I'll set this up," said he; "it's a little mince-meat I had. I brought it out, but I didn't really think I'd use it; I thought I'd make a few apple-pies."

"I'd make the mince ones, Lawson; I guess they'd taste good. You need some-thin' hearty whilst you're hayin'."

"Well, perhaps it would be a good idea for me to."

"Lawson, them cherry-trees out in front of the house are loaded with cherries, ain't they?"

Lawson stared at her. "There ain't a cherry on 'em this year," said he; "I've been wonderin' what ailed 'em. Porter thinks it's that frost we had, when they were blowed out."

"You'd better go an' look again by and by. I guess you didn't look very sharp; the trees was red with 'em. Them blush-roses is beautiful, too."

"Why, there ain't one rose on the bushes."

"I rather guess I know when I see 'em."

A SOUVENIR.

“NANCY, why don’t you show Paulina *that?*”

“Now, Charlotte, it ain’t worth showing.”

“Now do show me what it is: you’ve got my curiosity all roused up,” said Paulina. She cocked up her face at the other two women, who were taller. She was very small and lean; she wore her black hair heavily frizzed, and had on a fine black silk dress, and a lace bonnet with some red flowers. Charlotte, otherwise Mrs. Steadman, was very proud to take her about, she was so airy and well dressed. She was Mrs. Jerome Loomis, an out-of-town lady, a cousin of her late husband’s, who was visiting her for a few days. She had taken her over to call on her sister Nancy, Mrs. Weeks, this afternoon. She herself had on nothing better than a plain black-and-white checked gingham; it was a warm afternoon, but she had realised keenly her reflected grandeur as she had walked up the street

with her well-dressed guest. She was a tall, spare woman, and usually walked with a nervous stride, but to-day, all unconsciously, she nipped, and teetered, and swung her limp gingham skirts with just the same air that Paulina did her black silk one. It was a nervous imitation. Mrs. Steadman was incapable of anything else: she was not a weak woman. Her mind, being impressed, simply produced a reflex action in her body. She would have despised herself if she had known it, because of the very pride which led her into it.

The call had been made, and the three women were standing in Mrs. Weeks's entry taking leave.

Paulina went on coaxingly: "Now do show it to me. What is it? I know it is something beautiful, or your sister wouldn't have said anything about it."

Paulina had a protruding upper jaw, and when she smiled her mouth stretched far back. She smiled a good deal when she talked. She jerked her head too, and moved her eyes. She affected a snapping vivacity of manner, or else she had it naturally. She did not know which it was herself, but she admired it in herself.

Mrs. Weeks, who looked a deal like her

sister, except that she was paler, and her hair was greyer, and she wore spectacles, coloured up faintly.

"'Tain't worth seein'," said she deprecatingly; "but as long's Charlotte's spoke of it, I don't mind showin' it to you."

Then she opened the door opposite the sitting-room, and with an air at once solemn and embarrassed, motioned her callers to precede her.

Paulina bobbed her head about engagingly. "Dear me, which is it? There are so many pretty things here I never could tell which you meant."

Mrs. Weeks was innocently proud of her best parlour. She had so much faith in its grandeur that she was almost afraid of it herself. Every time she opened the door its glories smote her freshly, and caused her to thrill with awe and delight. Until the last two years she had been used to the commonest and poorest things in the way of furniture; indeed, this parlour had not been finished and plastered till lately. To have it completed and furnished had been the principal longing of her life; now it was accomplished by dint of the closest work and economy; it was the perfect flower, as it were, of all her wishes and

fancies. When she had her parlour she had always meant to have something good, she had said, and now it was superlatively good to her simple eyes. There was a gilded paper on the walls, and a Brussels carpet with an enormous flower pattern on the floor. The furniture was covered with red plush—everybody else in the town had haircloth, plush was magnificent audacity. Every chair had a tidy on its back; there was a very large ruffled lamp-mat for the marble-top table; there were mats for the vases on the shelf, and there was a beautiful rug in front of the fireplace.

Paulina darted towards it, her silk and her stiff white skirt rattling. "*Is this it?*"

"*This,*" said Mrs Steadman, pointing impressively at the wall.

"Oh! Why, Mrs. Weeks, where did you get it? who made it?"

"She made it," said her sister; "an' she wa'n't long about it either."

"Why, you don't mean it! How could you ever have had the patience? All those little fine, beautiful flowers are made of——"

"*Hair.* Yes, every one of 'em. Jest look close. Thar's rosebuds, an' lilies, an' pansies, an' poppies, an' acorns, besides the leaves."

"I see. Oh, that *dear* little rosebud in that corner made out of sandy hair! And that acorn is so natural! and that sprig of ivy! Mrs. Weeks, I don't see how you can do such things."

Even Nancy Weeks's mild nature could not hinder her from straightening herself up a little out of mere self-respect as she gazed at her intricate handiwork with her admiring guests.

"I made the whole wreath," said she, "out of my folks' hair—out of the Wilsons'—Charlotte an' me was Wilsons, you know. I had a good many locks of 'em 'way back. I had some of my great-grandmother's hair, an' my grandmother's. That little forget-me-not in the corner's made out of my great-grandmother's—I didn't hev much of that—an' that lily's grandmother's. She was a light-favoured woman, an' her hair turned a queer kind of a yeller-grey. I had a great piece of it mother cut off after she died. It worked in real pretty. Then I had a lot of my mother's, an' some of my sister's that died, an' a child's that mother lost when he was a baby, and a little of my uncle Solomon White's, mother's brother's, an' some of my father's. Then thar's some of the little boy's that Charlotte lost."

"They're all dead whose hair is in it?" said Paulina, with awed and admiring interest.

Nancy looked at her sister.

"Well, thar's one in it that ain't dead," said Charlotte hesitatingly, returning her sister's look. "Nancy wanted some hair that colour dreadfully. None of the Wilsons' was sandy. That reddish rosebud you spoke of was made out of it."

"Whose was it?" asked Paulina curiously.

"Oh, well—somebody's."

"Well," said Paulina, with a sigh, "it's beautiful, and it must have been a sight of work. I don't see how you ever had the patience to do it. You're a wonderful woman."

"Oh no! It wa'n't so very much to do after you got at it."

"It's such an ornament, and apart from that it must be such a comfort to you to have it."

"That's what I tell Nancy. Of course it makes a handsome picture to hang on the wall. But I should think full as much of keepin' the hair so; it's such a nice way."

"That oval frame is elegant, too."

After her callers had gone, Nancy, with

simple pleasure and self-gratulation, thought over what they had said. This innocent, narrow-minded, middle-aged woman felt as much throbbing wonder and delight over her hair wreath as any genius over one of his creations. As far as happiness of that kind went she was just as well off as a Michael Angelo or a Turner ; and as far as anything else, she was just as good a woman for believing in hair wreaths.

She had toiled hard over this one ; seemingly, nothing but true artistic instinct, and delight in work, could have urged her on. It was exceedingly slow, nervous work, and she was a very delicate woman. Many a night she had lain awake with her tired brain weaving the hair roses and lilies which her fingers had laid down.

Paulina spoke to Charlotte on their way home about her sister's looking so frail.

"I know it," said Charlotte. "Nancy never had any backbone, an' she's worked awful hard. I s'pose it's more'n she ought to do, makin' all those fancy fixin's ; but she's crazy to do 'em, can't seem to let 'em alone ; an' she does have a real knack at it."

"That hair wreath was beautiful," assented the other ; "but I should have been afraid it would have worn on her."

When they got home, Mrs. Steadman's daughter Emmeline had tea ready. She was a capable young woman ; she took in dress-making, and supported herself and mother, and had all she could do. She was rather pretty ; tall and slender like her mother ; with a round face, and a mouth with an odd, firm pucker to it when she talked, that strangers took for a smile ; she had very rosy cheeks.

There was a prayer-meeting in the church vestry that evening, and after tea Mrs. Steadman proposed going, with her company and her daughter. Emmeline demurred a little. She guessed she wouldn't go, she said.

"Why not?" asked her mother sharply. She still kept a tight rein over this steady, dutiful daughter of hers. "You don't expect anybody to-night?"

Her mother said "anybody" with a regard for secrecy ; she meant Andrew Stoddard.

Emmeline coloured very red. "No, I don't," she said quickly ; "I'll go" She was not engaged to the young man, and felt sensitive. It seemed to her if she should stay at home for him, and he should not come, and her mother and her cousin should suspect her of it, she could not bear it ; besides

she did not really expect him ; there was nothing but the chance he might come to keep her. So she put on her hat, and went to the meeting with her mother and Mrs. Loomis.

She wondered when she got home if he had been there, but there was no way of finding out. He had to drive from a town six miles further up the river to see her. He was the son of the country storekeeper there, and acted himself as head clerk. He was a steady, fine-looking young man, though he had the name of being rather fiery-tempered. People thought he was a great catch for Emmeline. He had been to see her some six weeks now. She hoped he would ask her to marry him : she could not help it ; for she had grown fond of him.

Her mother was sure that he would—in fact, she hardly knew but he had. Emmeline herself was not so sure ; she had never a very exalted opinion of herself, and was more certain of her own loving than she was of anybody else's.

When Sunday night came she stayed at home from meeting, without any comment from her mother, who put on her best bonnet and shawl, and went alone. Paulina Loomis had gone home the day before.

Emmeline had put the little front room, which served alike as dressmaker's shop and parlour, in the nicest order. It was a poor little place anyway. There was a worn rag-carpet, some cane-seated chairs, and one black wooden rocker covered with chintz. An old-fashioned bureau stood against the wall; and of a week-day a mahogany card-table, made square by having its two leaves up, was in the centre of the room. Emmeline used this last for cutting.

To-day she had put down the leaves, and moved it back against the wall, between the two front windows. Then she had got the best lamp out of the closet, and set it on the table. It was a new lamp, with a pretty figured globe, one she had bought since Andrew began coming to see her. She had picked a bunch of flowers out in her garden, too, and arranged them in a gilt-and-white china vase, and set it beside the lamp. There were balsams, and phlox, and larkspur, and pinks, and some asparagus for green. She had tucked all her work and her patterns out of sight in the bureau drawers, swept and dusted, and got out a tidy to pin on the rocking-chair. Then she had put on her best dress, and sat down to wait. She thought, perhaps, he would come

before her mother went to church ; but he did not. So she sat there alone in the fading light, waiting. Every time she heard a team coming, she thought it was his ; but it would roll past, and her heart would sink. At last the people began to flock home from meeting, and her mother's tall, stooping, black figure came in through the gate. She thought Andrew was there, so she went straight through the long narrow entry to the kitchen ; Emmeline knew why she did. After a while she opened the door from the kitchen cautiously, and peered into the dark room : she had a lamp out there.

"There's nobody in here, mother," said Emmeline ; "you needn't be afraid."

"Didn't he come ? I thought I didn't hear any talkin'."

"No ; nobody's been here."

"Why, I wonder what's the reason ?"

"I s'pose there's some good one," replied Emmeline puckering up her lips firmly. "I'm tired ; I guess I'll go to bed."

If she felt badly she did not show it, except by her silence at her mother's wondering remarks ; but she had always been very reticent about Andrew, not often speaking his name. She did not cry any after she went to bed—indeed, she could not, for

her mother slept with her; her father was dead.

The weeks went on, and Emmeline got ready for Andrew a good many times, half-surreptitiously. She would put sundry little ornamental touches to the room, or herself, hoping her mother would not observe them; but he never came. The neighbours began to notice it, and to throw out various hints and insinuations to Mrs. Steadman. They never said anything to Emmeline. She was so still, they did not dare to. Her mother met them frostily. Emmeline didn't care if Andrew Stoddard didn't come. She guessed she should laugh to see *her* fretting over him. She even hinted, in her rampant loyalty, that p'rhaps there was some reason folks didn't dream of why he didn't come. Mebbe he'd been given to understand he wasn't wanted.

One afternoon she came home from one of the neighbours' with some news. She had seen a woman who lived next to the Stoddards, and Andrew had gone West.

"Has he?" said Emmeline, and went on sewing.

"You're a queer girl," said her mother. She liked Emmeline to be dignified and reticent about it to other people, but she felt

aggrieved that she did not unbend and talk it over with her.

About this time her sister Nancy was taken sick with a slow fever. She lingered along a few weeks ; the fever left her, but she had no strength to rally ; then she died. It was a hard blow to Charlotte. She had been very fond of her sister, and had an admiration for her which was somewhat singular, since she herself was much the stronger character of the two. She had seemed to feel almost as much satisfaction in Nancy's fine parlour and fancy-work as if they had been her own. Perhaps she consoled herself in that way for not having any of her own, and maintained to herself her dignity among her neighbours.

After her sister's death she began to think that some of these fine things ought by right to belong to her.

"Nancy earned 'em jest as much by savin' as Thomas did by workin'," she told Emmeline. "It wouldn't be nothin' more'n fair for her sister to have 'em." But Thomas Weeks had in him capabilities of action of which people generally did not suspect him.

He was a little, spare, iron-grey, inoffensive-looking man, but he had been a small tyrant over his mild-visaged, spectacled wife.

Now she was dead he had definite plans of his own, which matured as soon as decency would permit, and which did not include his giving his deceased wife's sister his fine red-plush furniture. She visited him often and hinted, but he smiled knowingly, and talked about something else.

Nancy had been dead about six months, when, one afternoon, Mrs. Steadman saw him drive past in a shiny buggy with a lady. Her suspicions were aroused, and she talked, and worried, and watched. She found out he had a new hat and coat, and was having the house painted, and the sitting-room and kitchen papered. Everybody said he was going to get married, but nobody seemed to know to whom. At last it came out. He came to church one Sunday with his bride—a short, stout, sallow woman in middle-aged bridal finery, no more like poor Nancy than a huckleberry bush is like a willow sapling. She was a widow from a neighbouring town, and reputed to have quite a snug little property—four or five thousand dollars.

Emmeline and her mother sat just across the aisle from the newly wedded couple. Mrs. Steadman had given one startled, comprehensive glance at them when they

turned into the pew. After that she did not look at them again, but sat straight and rigid, holding her chin so stiffly against her long neck that it looked like a double one, pursing up her lips as if to keep back a rushing crowd of words which were clamouring behind them.

She told Emmeline, when they got home, that it was all she could do not to speak right out in meeting and tell Thomas Weeks just what she thought of him.

"I'd like to get right up," said she, "an' ask him 'f he remembered it was hardly six months since my poor sister was laid away, an' 'f he'd ever heerd of such a thing as common decency an' respect for folks' memory, an' 'f he didn't think it was treatin' some folks pretty hard to bring another woman in to use their dead sister's things, when he'd never given them a penny's worth of 'em."

As far as the results went, Charlotte might just as well have spoken out in meeting, and accused her recreant brother-in-law openly. She had always been a woman who talked a great deal, and could not help making funerals for all her woes, and now there was not a woman in the town with whom she did not discuss Thomas's second

marriage, and her own grievances in connection therewith. They all sympathised with her : women always do in such cases.

She warmed up on the subject to everybody who came into the shop. Emmeline kept quietly sewing, giving her opinions on her work when asked for them, but not saying much besides. Her mother did not understand her ; privately she thought her unfeeling. Emmeline had not heard a word from Andrew Stoddard all this time. For a while she had had a forlorn hope of a letter, but it had died away now. Outwardly she was living just as she always had before he had come ; but the old homely ways, whose crooks she had thought she knew by heart, were constantly giving her a feeling of pain and strangeness. She was not imaginative nor self-conscious ; she never really knew how unhappy she was, or she would have been unhappier. She kept steadily at work, and ate and slept and went about as usual ; she never dreamed of its being possible for her to do anything else, but the *difference* was all the time goading her terribly.

Her mother's fretting over the affair had disturbed her actively more than anything else ; she was almost glad now to have it

turned into another channel. And this new one threatened to be well worn indeed before Mrs. Steadman should leave it. She scolded and cried in it. She was divided between grief and indignation.

Poor Nancy's few articles of finery rankled more and more in her mind. She journeyed up to Thomas's house evening after evening to see if there were a light in the best parlour; report said that they used it common now. She came home trembling: there was one.

"To think of their usin' poor Nancy's best plush furniture like that!" she said; "settin' in them stuffed chairs every evenin' jest as if they was wooden ones; they won't last no time at all. An' to think how hard she worked an' saved to get 'em, an' how choice she was of 'em. Then thar's all them tidies an' mats an' rugs, an' that beautiful hair wreath made out of my folks' hair!"

This last seemed to disturb Charlotte more than anything else. She had not a doubt, she said, but what working on it had hastened Nancy's death, and to think that that other woman should have it!

One Friday evening Mrs. Steadman started for meeting. Emmeline did not go. She had some work she was hurrying on,

and her mother, contrary to her usual habit, did not urge her to; indeed she rather advocated her staying at home.

About half an hour after her mother left, Emmeline laid down her work—it had grown too dark for her to see without lighting a lamp. As she sat at the window, a moment in the dusk, she saw a figure hurrying up which she did not think could be her mother's, it came so fast and flurriedly; besides, it was not time for meeting to be out.

But when the gate opened she saw it was. Her mother scuttled up the steps into the entry, and opened the shop door cautiously.

"Emmeline, anybody here?"

"No."

She came in then. She had something under her arm. "Light the lamp, Emmeline—quick! See what I've got!"

Emmeline got up and lighted the lamp. "Why, mother!" said she, aghast. Her mother was holding the hair wreath, in its oval gilt frame, with an expression of mingled triumph and terror. "Why, mother, how did you get it?"

"Get it? I walked into the house and took it," said Charlotte defiantly. "I don't care; I meant to have it. Nancy made it,

an' worked herself 'most to death over it, an' it's made out of my folks' hair, an' I had a right to it."

"Why, mother, how did you ever dare?"

"I peeked into the vestry, an' saw 'em both in thar on one of the back seats. Then I run right up to the house. I knew unless they did different from what they used to, I could git in through the shed. An' I did. I went right through the kitchen an' sittin'-room into the parlour. It made me feel bad enough. That plush furniture's gettin' real worn, usin' it so common; the nap's all rubbed off on the edges, an' the tidies are dirty. I saw a great spot on that Brussels carpet, too, where somebody'd tracked in. It don't look much as it used to. I could have sat right down an' cried. But I was afraid to stop long, so I jest took this picture down an' come off. I didn't see a soul. I s'pose you think I've done an awful thing, Emmeline?"

"I'm afraid you'll have some trouble about it, mother."

"I ain't afraid."

In spite of her bravado she was afraid. She tucked away the wreath out of sight upstairs, and when Thomas Weeks came

to the door the next day, she answered his ring with an inward trepidation. She had an inclination to run out of the back door, and leave Emmeline to encounter him, but she resisted it.

She came off victorious, however. Even Thomas Weeks succumbed before the crushing arguments and the withering sarcasms, tumbling pell-mell over each other, which she brought to bear upon him.

"He says I may keep it," she told Emmeline when she went in. "He guesses Mis' Weeks don't set no great store by it, an' he don't care. He was awful toppin' at first, but he began to look kind of 'shamed, an' wilted right down after I'd talked to him a while. I told him jest what I thought of the whole business from beginnin' to end."

After that the hair wreath was hung up in state in the front room, and openly displayed. Everybody upheld Charlotte in taking it, and she felt herself quite a heroine. Nothing delighted her more than to have people speak about it and admire it.

One day she was descanting on its beauties to one of the neighbours, when a question arose which attracted Emmeline's attention.

"Whose hair is that reddish rosebud made out of?" asked the woman.

Mrs. Steadman gave a warning "Hush!" and a scared glance at her daughter. Emmeline saw it. After the woman had gone she went up to the wreath, and looked at it closely. "Mother," said she, "whose hair is in that rosebud?"

Mrs. Steadman shrank before her daughter's look.

"Mother, you *didn't* go to my drawer and take that out! I missed it! How did you know I had it?"

"Now, Emmeline, thar ain't no reason for you to get so mad. I went to your drawer one day for something, an' happened to see it. An' poor Nancy wanted some hair that colour dreadfully, an' she didn't really want to go out of the family, an' we all thought——"

"Mother, did *he* know it?"

"Now, Emmeline, it's ridiculous for you to fire up so. I s'pose he did. You remember that last Friday night when Paulina was here last summer, an' we all went to meetin'? He came that night, and we warn't to home, and Nancy was settin' on her door-step when he drove by, an' she had to call him in an' show him the wreath. An' I s'pose she let on 'bout his hair bein' in it. I told her she was awful silly; but she

said he kinder cornered her up, an' she couldn't help it. I scolded her for it. She said he seemed kinder upset."

"Mother, that was the reason."

"Reason for what?"

"The reason he stopped coming, and—everything."

"Emmeline Steadman, I don't believe it. 'Tain't likely a fellar'd get so mad as that jest 'cause somebody'd made a rosebud out of his hair to put in a wreath; 'taint reasonable. I should think he'd been rather pleased than anything else."

"O mother, don't you see? He—gave it to me, and he thought that was all I cared for it, to give it to Aunt Nancy to put in a hair wreath. And he is awful sensitive and quick tempered."

"I should think he was, to get mad at such a thing as that; I can't believe he did!"

"I *know* he did!"

"Well, there ain't any call for you to feel huffy about it. I'm sorry I did it: I'm sure I wouldn't if I'd dreamed it was goin' to make any trouble. I didn't have any idea he was such a fire-an'-tow kind of a fellar as that. I guess it's jest as well we didn't have him in the family; thar wouldn't have been no livin' with him."

That night Emmeline wrote a letter to Andrew Stoddard. She sat up for the purpose, pretending she had some work to finish, after her mother had gone to bed. She wrote the sort of letter that most New England girls in her standing would have written. She began it "Dear Friend," touched very lightly on the subject of the hair, just enough to explain it, then decorously hoped that if any misunderstanding had interrupted their friendship it might be done away with; she should always value his very highly. Then she signed herself his true friend "Emmeline E. Steadman."

Nobody knew what tortures of suspense Emmeline suffered after she had sent her poor little friendly letter. She sewed on quietly just as usual. Her mother knew nothing about it.

She began to go regularly to the post-office, though not at mail times. She would make an errand to the store where it was, and, after she was through trading, inquire quietly and casually if there were a letter for her.

One morning she came home from one of those errands, dropped down in a chair, and covered her face with her hands. Her

mother was frightened: she was mixing bread: they were both out in the kitchen.

"Emmeline, what is the matter?"

Emmeline burst into a bitter cry: "He's married. Mrs. Wilson told me just now. Mrs. Adams told her: she lives next to his folks."

"Why, Emmeline, I didn't know you cared so much about that fellar as all that!"

"I didn't!" said Emmeline fiercely; "but I—wrote to him, an' what's he goin' to think? I'd died first, if I'd known. Oh, if you'd only let that lock of hair alone! You brought all this trouble on me!"

"Well, Emmeline Steadman, if you want to talk so to the mother that's done for you what I have, on account of a fellar that's showed pretty plain he didn't care any great about you, you can."

Emmeline said no more, but, with a look of despair, rose to go upstairs.

"I've told you I am sorry I took it."

"I think you'd better be," said Emmeline, as she went through the door.

She did no more work that day; she stayed upstairs, and would see nobody: she did not care now what people thought. Mrs. Steadman grew more and more conscience

stricken and worried ; she went for the night mail herself, with a forlorn hope of something, she did not know what.

When she got back she came directly upstairs into the room where Emmeline was. "Emmeline," said she, in a shaking voice, "here's a letter for you ; I guess it's from him."

Emmeline took it and opened it, her face set and unmoved ; she had it all settled that the letter was to tell her of his marriage. She read down the first page, her face changing with every word. Her mother watched her breathlessly, as if she too were reading the letter by reflection in her daughter's face.

At last Emmeline looked up at her mother. She was radiant ; she was trying to keep from smiling, lest she betray too much ; but she could not help it. She looked blissful and shamefaced together.

"Mother—he ain't married after all ; and he says it's all right about the hair ; and—he's coming home !"

Charlotte's face was as radiant as her daughter's, but she said, "Well, what do you think now ? After you've been such an ungrateful girl, blaming your mother, an' talkin' to her as you did this mornin', I

should think you'd be ashamed. You don't deserve it !”

Emmeline got off the bed ; with her letter in her hand she went over to her mother, and kissed her shyly on her soft, old cheek. “ I'm real sorry I spoke so, mother.”

AN OLD ARITHMETICIAN.

A STRONG, soft south wind had been blowing the day before, and the trees had dropped nearly all their leaves. There were left only a few brownish-golden ones dangling on the elms, and hardly any at all on the maples. There were many trees on the street, and the fallen leaves were heaped high. Mrs. Wilson Torry's little door-yard was ankle-deep with them. The air was full of their odour, which could affect the spirit like a song, and mingled with it was the scent of grapes.

The minister had been calling on Mrs. Torry that afternoon, and now he stood facing her on the porch, taking leave. He was very young, and this was his first parish. He was small and light and mild-looking; still he had considerable nervous volubility. The simple village women never found him hard to entertain.

Now, all at once, he made an exclamation, and fumbled in his pocket for a folded

paper. "There," said he, "I nearly forgot this. Mr. Plainfield requested me to hand this to you, Mrs. Torry. It is a problem which he has been working over; he gave it to me to try, and wanted me to propose, when I called, that you should see what you could do with it."

She seized it eagerly. "Well I'll see what I can do; but you an' he mustn't make no great calculations on me. You know I don't know anything about the 'rithmetic books an' the rules they hev nowadays; but I'm willin' to try."

"Oh, you'll have it done while Mr. Plainfield and I are thinking of it, Mrs. Torry."

"You ain't neither of you done it, then?"

"He had not at last accounts, and—I have not," replied the young man, laughing, but colouring a little.

The old lady's eyes gleamed as she looked at him, then at the paper. "I dare say I can't make head nor tail of it," said she, "but I'll see what I can do by an' by."

She had something of a childish air as she stood there. She was slender, and so short that she was almost dwarfed; her shoulders were curved a little by spinal disease. She had a small, round face, and a mouth which widened out innocently into

smiles as she talked. Her eyes looked out directly at one, like a child's; over them loomed a high forehead with bulging temples covered with deep wrinkles.

"You have always been very fond of mathematics, haven't you, Mrs. Torry?" said the minister, in his slow retreat.

"Lor', yes. I can't remember the time when I wa'n't crazy to cipher."

"Arithmetic is a very fascinating study, I think," remarked the minister, trying to slide easily off the subject and down the porch steps.

"'Tis to me. An' there's somethin' I was thinkin' about this very forenoon—seein' all them leaves on the ground made me, I s'pose. It's always been a sight of comfort to me to count. When I was a little girl I'd 'most rather count than play. I used to sit down and count by the hour together. I remember a little pewter porringer I had, that I used to fill up with beans an' count 'em. Well, it come into my head this forenoon what a blessed privilege it would be to count up all the beautiful things in this creation. Just think of countin' all them red an' gold-coloured leaves, an' all the grapes an' apples in the fall; an' when it come to the winter, all

the flakes of snow, an' the sparkles of frost ; an' when it come to the spring, all the flowers, an' blades of grass, an' the little, new light-green leaves. I don' know but you'll think it ain't exactly reverent, but it does seem to me that I'd rather do that than sing in the other world. Mebbe somebody does have to do the countin' ; mebbe it's singin' for some."

She stared up into the warm, blue air, in which the bare branches of the trees glistened, with a sweet solemn wonder in her old face.

The minister, in a bewildered way, pondered all the old woman had said, as he rustled down the street. Later, Mr. Plainfield (the young high-school teacher) and he would have a discussion over it. They often talked over Mrs. Wilson Torry.

After her caller had gone, the old woman entered the house. On the left of the little entry was the best room, where she had been entertaining the minister ; on the right, the kitchen. A young girl was in there eating an apple. She looked up when Mrs. Torry stood in the door.

"He's gone, ain't he?" said she.

"Why, Letty, when did you come?"

"A few minutes ago. School's just out.

I came in the back door, and heard him talking, so I kept still."

"Why didn't you come in and see him?"

"Oh, I didn't want to see him. What you got there, grandma?"

"Nothin' but a sum the minister brought me to do. He an' Mr. Plainfield have been workin' over it."

"Couldn't they do it?"

"Well, he said they hadn't neither of 'em done it yet."

"Is it awful hard?"

"I don' know. I 'ain't looked at it yet."

"Let me see. He didn't get it out of any of our books, I know. We never had anything like this."

"I s'pose it's one he come across somewhere. I guess I'll sit down an' look at it two or three minutes."

An old bureau stood against the wall; on it were arranged four religious newspapers in the exact order of their issues, the latest on top, Farmers' almanacs for the last four years filed in the same way, and a slate surmounted by an old arithmetic. The pile of newspapers was in the middle; the slate and almanacs were on either end.

Letty, soberly eating her apple, watched her grandmother getting out the arithmetic

and slate. She was a pretty young girl; her small, innocent face, in spite of its youthful roundness and fairness, reminded people of Mrs. Torry's.

"I don't think much of Mr. Plainfield anyhow," said she, as the click of her grandmother's pencil on the slate began; "and he knows I don't. He overheard me telling Lizzie Bascom so to-day. He came right up behind us on the street, and I know he heard. You ought to have seen his face."

"I don't see what you've got agin him," remarked Mrs. Torry absently, as she dotted down figures.

"I haven't much of anything that I know of against him, only I don't think he's much of a teacher. He can't do examples as quickly as you, I know, and I don't think a man has any business to be school-teaching if he can't do examples as quickly as an old lady."

Mrs. Torry stopped her work, and fixed her round unwinking eyes full on the girl's face.

"Letty Torry, there's some things you don't understand. You never will understand 'em, if you live to be as old as Methuselah, as far as that's concerned. But you'll get so you know the things *air*. Sometimes

it don't make any difference if anybody's ignorant, an' 'ain't got any book-learnin'; air old, an' had a hard-workin' life. There'll be somethin' in 'em that everybody else 'ain't got; somethin' that growed, an' didn't have to be learned. I've got this faculty; I can cipher. It ain't nothin' agin Mr. Plainfield if he 'ain't got it; it's a *gift*." Her voice took on a solemn tone and trembled.

Letty looked at her with childish wonder. "Well," said she, with a subdued manner, "he has no right to teach, anyhow, without it. I guess I'll have another apple. I was real hungry."

So Letty ate another apple silently, while her grandmother worked at the problem again.

She did not solve it as easily as usual. She worked till midnight, her little lamp drawn close to her on the kitchen table; then she went to bed, with the answer still in doubt.

"It ain't goin' to do for me to set up any longer," said she forlornly, as she replaced the slate on the bureau. "I shall be sick if I do. But I declare I don't see what's got into me. I hope I ain't losin' my faculty."

She could not sleep much. The next morning, as soon as their simple breakfast

was eaten and Letty had gone to school, she seated herself with her slate and pencil.

When Letty came home at noon she found her grandmother still at work, and no dinner ready.

"I do declare!" cried the old woman. "You don't mean to say you're home, Letty! It *ain't* twelve o'clock, is it?"

"Course it is; quarter past."

"I 'ain't got one mite of dinner ready, then. I've been so took up with the sum I hadn't no idea how the time was goin'. I don' know what you will do, child."

"Oh, I'll get some bread and milk, grandma; just as soon have it as anything else. Got the problem done?"

"No, I 'ain't. I feel real bad about your dinner. I'll kindle up a fire now an' fry you an egg—there be time enough."

"I'd rather have bread and milk."

After Letty had gone to school for the afternoon, and Mrs. Torry had been working fruitlessly for an hour longer, she dropped her pencil.

"I declare," said she, "I'm afraid I am losin' my faculty!"

Tears stood in her eyes. "I won't give up that I am, anyhow," said she, and took the pencil again.

When Letty returned, in the latter part of the afternoon, she scarcely knew it, with the full meaning of the word. She saw her, but her true consciousness was so full of figures that Letty's fair face could only look in at the door.

Letty ran in hastily; a young girl was waiting for her outside. "O grandma," cried Letty, "Lizzie's going to Ellsworth to do an errand for her mother; she's coming back on the last train. Can't I go with her?"

Her grandmother stared at her for a minute and made no answer.

"She's got tickets for both of us. Can't I go, grandma?"

"Yes."

Letty smoothed her hair a little and put on her best hat; then she went.

"Good-bye," said she, looking back at the intent old figure; but she got no answer.

"Grandma's so taken up with an example she's got that she doesn't know anything," she told her friend when she was outside. "She didn't answer when I said good-bye; she forgot to get dinner to-day too."

Mrs. Torry worked on and on. She never looked up nor thought of anything else until it grew so dark that she could not see her

figures. "I'll have to light the lamp," said she, with a sigh.

After it was lighted she went to work again. She never thought of wanting any supper, though she had eaten nothing since morning.

The kitchen clock struck seven—Letty should have been home then—eight, and nine, but she never noticed it. A few minutes afterwards some one knocked on the door. She ciphered on. Then the knocks were repeated, louder and quicker.

"Somebody's knockin', I guess," she muttered, and opened the door. Mr. Plainfield stood there. He was a handsome young man with rosy cheeks; he was always smiling. He looked past her into the room inquiringly. "Is Letty at home?" said he.

"Letty?"

"Yes, Letty. Is she at home?"

"Why, yes, she's here. Letty!"

"Has she gone to bed?"

"Why, yes, I guess she has." Mrs. Torry opened the door at the foot of the stairs. "Letty! Letty!"

"I guess she must be asleep," said she, turning to the young man, who had stepped into the kitchen. "Want me to go up an' see? Did you want anything pertickler?"

He hesitated. "If you had—just as soon—I—had something special——"

The old lady climbed the steep, uncarpeted stairs feebly, with a long pat on every step. She came down faster, reckless of her trembling uncertainty. "She ain't there! Letty's gone! Where is she?"

"You knew she went to Ellsworth with Lizzie?"

"No I didn't."

"Why, she said something to you about it, didn't she?"

"I don' know whether she did or not."

"Lizzie just told me that she missed her in the depot. She left her there for a minute while she went back for something she had forgotten. When she came back she was gone. The train was all ready, and Lizzie thought she must be on it, so she got on herself. She did not see her in the depot here, and has been crying about it, and afraid to tell till just now. I came right over as soon as I knew about it."

"O Letty! Letty! Where's Letty? O Mr. Plainfield, you go an' find her! Go right off! You will, won't you? Letty allers liked you."

"I always liked Letty," said the young

man brokenly. "I'll find her—don't you worry."

"You'll go right off now?"

"Of course I will; I won't wait a minute."

"O Letty, Letty! Where is she? What shall I do? That little bit of a thing—and she was always one of the frightened kind—out all alone; an' it's night! She never went to Ellsworth alone in her hull life. She didn't know nothin' about the town, an' she didn't have a cent of money in her pocket."

"I'll send Mrs. Bascom over to stay with you," Mr. Plainfield called back as he hurried off.

Soon Mrs. Bascom came, poking her white, nervous face in the door inquiringly. "She ain't come?"

"No. O Mis' Bascom, what shall I do?"

"O Mis' Torry, I do feel so bad about it I don't know what to do. If Lizzie had only told before! but there she was upstairs crying, and afraid to tell. I've been scolding her, but she felt so bad I had to stop. She called me, an' told me finally; an' I guess twa'n't long before Mr. Plainfield started off to find out if she *was* home. It was lucky he was boarding with us.

He'll find her if anybody can; he's as quick as lightning. He turned white's a sheet when I told him."

"O Mis' Bascom!"

"Now, don't give up so, Mis' Torry. He'll find her. She can't be very far off. You'll see her walking in here first thing you know. He's got a real fast team, an' he's started for Ellsworth now. He went past me like a streak when I was coming up the road. He'll have her back safe and sound before morning."

"O Letty! Letty! Oh, what shall I do? It's my own fault, every mite of it's my own fault. 'Tis; you don't know nothin' about it. The minister brought me a sum, he an' Mr. Plainfield had been workin' on, to do, yesterday afternoon, an' I jest sat and ciphered half the night, an' all day. I didn't know no more what Letty asked me, when she came in from school, than nothin' at all. I didn't more'n half know when she come. I didn't know nothin' but them figgers, an' now Letty's lost, an' it's my fault."

"Why, you might have let her gone if you'd known."

"I guess I shouldn't let her gone all alone with your Lizzie, to come home after dark

in the last train, little delicate thing as she was. I guess I shouldn't; an' I guess I should have started up an' done something, if I'd known, when she wasn't here at train time. I didn't get the sum done, an' I'm glad of it; it seems to me jest as if I was losin' my faculty as I'm growin' older, an' I hope I am."

"Now, don't talk so, Mis' Torry. Sit down an' try to be calm. You'll be sick."

"I guess there ain't much bein' calm. I tell you what 'tis, Mis' Bascom, I've been a wicked woman. I've been thinkin' so much of this faculty I've had for cipherin' that I've set it afore everything—I hev. Only yesterday that poor child didn't hev any dinner but crackers an' milk, 'cause I was so took up with the sum that I forgot it. An' she was jest as patient as a lamb about it; said she'd rather hev crackers an' milk than anything else. Oh, dear! dear!"

"Don't cry, Mis' Torry."

"I can't help it. It don't make no difference what folks are born with a faculty for—whether it's cipherin', or singin', or writin' poetry—the love that's betwixt human beings an' the help that's betwixt 'em ought to come first. I've known it all

the time, but I've gone agin it, an' now I've got my pay. What shall I do?"

Mrs. Bascom remained with her all night, but she could not pacify her in the least. She was nearly distracted herself. She was fearful that her Lizzie might be blamed.

The next day people flocked to the house to inquire if there were any news from Letty, and to comfort her grandmother. Sympathy seemed fairly dripping like fragrant oil from these simple, honest hearts; but the poor old woman got no refreshing influence from it. She kept on her old strain in their ears. She had lost Letty, and it was all her own fault, and what should she do? Mr. Plainfield did not come home. The minister took his place in school. Nothing was heard until noon; then a telegram from the teacher came. He thought he was on Letty's track, he said; they should hear again.

Next day there was a second message: Letty was safe; coming home as soon as possible. The following day passed then, and not another word came. The old grandmother's faith and hope seemed to have deserted her. She knew Letty was not found; she never would be found. She and Mr. Plainfield were both lost now.

Something dreadful had happened to both of them.

"The worst of it is," she told Mrs. Bascom one afternoon, with a fierce indignation at herself, "I can't help thinkin' about that awful sum now after all that's happened. Them figgers keep troopin' into my head right in the midst of my thinkin' about Letty. It's all I can do to let that slate alone, an' not take it off the bureau. But I won't—I won't if it kills me not to. An' all the time I jest despise myself for it: a-lettin' my faculty for cipherin' get ahead of things that's higher an' sacreder. I do think I've lost my faculty now, an I 'most hope I hev. But it won't make no difference 'bout Letty now. Oh dear! dear! What shall I do?"

On the fourth day after Letty's disappearance, between six and seven o'clock in the evening, Mrs. Torry was sitting alone in her kitchen. The last sympathiser had gone home to eat her supper.

The distressed old woman had drunk a cup of tea; that was all she would touch. The pot was still on the stove. There was a soft yellow light from the lamp over the room. The warm air was full of the fragrance of boiling tea.

Mrs. Torry sat looking over at the bureau. She would have looked the same way if she had been starving and seen food there.

"Oh," she whispered, "if—I could—only work on that sum a little while, it does seem as if 'twould comfort me more'n anything. O Lord! I wonder if I was to blame? 'Twas the way I was made, an' I couldn't help that. P'rhaps I should hev let Letty gone, an' she'd been lost, anyway. I wonder if I hev lost my faculty?"

She sat there looking over at the slate. At last she rose and started to cross the room. Midway she stopped.

"Oh, what am I doin'? Letty's lost, an' I'm goin' to cipherin'! S'pose she should come in an' ketch me? She'd be so hurt she'd never get over it. She wouldn't think I cared anything about her."

She stood looking at the slate and thinking for a moment. Then her face settled into a hard calm.

"Letty won't come back—she won't never come back. I might as well cipher as anything else."

She went across the room, got the slate and pencil, and returned to her seat. She had been ciphering for a minute or so when a sound outside caused her to start and stop.

She sat with mouth open and chin trembling, listening. The sound came nearer ; it was at the door. Of all the sweet sounds which had smote that old woman's ears since her birth—songs of birds, choral hymns, Sabbath bells—there had been none so sweet as this. It was Letty's thin, girlish treble just outside the door which she heard.

For a second as she sat listening, her face was rapt, angelic ; in spite of its sallowness and wrinkles it might have figured in an altar-piece. Then it changed. The slate was in her lap. What would Letty think ?

It was all passing swiftly ; the door-latch rattled ; she slipped the slate under her gingham apron, and sat still.

"O poor grandma !" cried Letty, running in ; "you've been frightened 'most to death about me, haven't you ?" She bent over her grandmother and laid her soft, pretty cheek against hers.

"O Letty ! I didn't think you'd ever come back."

"I have ; but I did have the dreadfulest time. I got carried 'way out West on an express train. Just think of it ! I got on the wrong train while I was waiting for Lizzie. I was frightened almost to death. But Mr. Plainfield telegraphed ahead. He

found out where I was going, and they took me to an hotel ; and then he came for me. You haven't said anything to Mr. Plainfield, grandma."

The young man was standing smiling behind Letty. She looked astonished when her grandmother did not rise to speak to him, but sat perfectly still as she uttered some broken thanks.

"Why, grandma, you ain't sick, are you?" said she.

"No—I ain't sick," said her grandmother, with a meek tone.

When Mr. Plainfield left, in a few moments, Letty gave a half-defiant, half-ashamed glance at her grandmother, and followed him out, closing the door.

When she returned Mrs. Torry was standing by the table pouring out a cup of tea for her. The slate was in its usual place on the bureau.

"Grandma," said Letty, blushing innocently, "I thought I ought to say something to Mr. Plainfield, you know. I hadn't, and I knew he heard what I said to Lizzie that day. I thought I ought to ask his pardon, when he had done so much for me. I've made up my mind that I do like him. There's other things besides doing arithmetic examples."

"I guess there is, child. Them things is all second. I think I'd rather have a man who hadn't got any special faculty, if I was goin' to git married."

"Nobody said anything about getting married, grandma."

Pretty soon Letty went to bed. She was worn out with her adventures.

"Ain't you going too, grandma?" asked she, turning around, lamp in hand, at the foot of the stairs.

"Pretty soon, child ; pretty soon. I've—got a little somethin' I want to do first."

The grandmother sat up till nearly morning working over the problem. Once in a while she would lay down her slate and climb upstairs and peep into Letty's little peaceful girl-chamber to see if she were safe.

"If I have got that dear child safe, an' 'ain't lost my faculty, it's more 'n I deserve," muttered she, as she took her slate the last time.

The next evening the minister came over. "So, Letty's come," he said, when Mrs. Torry opened the door.

"Yes, Letty's come, and—I've got that sum you gave me done."

A CONFLICT ENDED.

IN Acton there were two churches, a Congregational and a Baptist. They stood on opposite sides of the road, and the Baptist edifice was a little further down than the other. On Sunday morning both bells were ringing. The Baptist bell was much larger, and followed quickly on the soft peal of the Congregational with a heavy brazen clang which vibrated a good while. The people went flocking through the street to the irregular jangle of the bells. It was a very hot day, and the sun beat down heavily ; parasols were bobbing over all the ladies' heads.

More people went into the Baptist church, whose society was much the larger of the two. It had been for the last ten years—ever since the Congregational had settled a new minister. His advent had divided the church, and a good third of the congregation had gone over to the Baptist brethren, with whom they still remained.

It is probable that many of them passed

their old sanctuary to-day with the original stubborn animosity as active as ever in their hearts, and led their families up the Baptist steps with the same strong spiritual pull of indignation.

One old lady, who had made herself prominent on the opposition, trotted by this morning with the identical wiry vehemence which she had manifested ten years ago. She wore a full black silk skirt, which she held up inanely in front, and allowed to trail in the dust in the rear.

Some of the staunch Congregational people glanced at her amusedly. One fleshy fair-faced girl in blue muslin said to her companion, with a laugh: "See that old lady trailing her best black silk by to the Baptist. Ain't it ridiculous how she keeps on showing out? I heard some one talking about it yesterday."

"Yes."

The girl coloured up confusedly. "Oh dear!" she thought to herself. The lady with her had an unpleasant history connected with this old church quarrel. She was a small bony woman in a shiny purple silk, which was strained very tightly across her sharp shoulder-blades. Her bonnet was quite elaborate with flowers and plumes, as

was also her companion's. In fact, she was the village milliner, and the girl was her apprentice.

When the two went up the church steps, they passed a man of about fifty, who was sitting thereon well to one side. He had a singular face—a mild forehead, a gently curving mouth, and a terrible chin, with a look of strength in it that might have abashed mountains. He held his straw hat in his hand, and the sun was shining full on his bald head.

The milliner half stopped, and gave an anxious glance at him ; then passed on. In the vestibule she stopped again.

"You go right in, Margy," she said to the girl. "I'll be along in a minute."

"Where be you going, Miss Barney?"

"You go right in. I'll be there in a minute."

Margy entered the audience-room then, as if fairly brushed in by the imperious wave of a little knotty hand, and Esther Barney stood waiting until the rush of entering people was over. Then she stepped swiftly back to the side of the man seated on the steps. She spread her large black parasol deliberately, and extended the handle towards him.

"No, no, Esther; I don't want it—I don't want it."

"If you're determined on setting out in this broiling sun, Marcus Woodman, you jest take this parasol of mine an' use it."

"I don't want your parasol, Esther. I—"

"Don't you say it over again. Take it."

"I won't—not if I don't want to."

"You'll get a sunstroke."

"That's my own lookout."

"Marcus Woodman, you take it."

She threw all the force there was in her intense, nervous nature into her tone and look; but she failed in her attempt, because of the utter difference in quality between her own will and that with which she had to deal. They were on such different planes that hers slid by his with its own momentum; there could be no contact even of antagonism between them. He sat there rigid, every line of his face stiffened into an icy obstinacy. She held out the parasol towards him like a weapon.

Finally she let it drop at her side, her whole expression changed.

"Marcus," said she, "how's your mother?"

He started. "Pretty well, thank you, Esther."

"She's out to meeting, then?"

"Yes."

"I've been a-thinking—I ain't drove jest now—that may be I'd come over an' see her some day this week."

He rose politely then. "Wish you would, Esther. Mother'd be real pleased, I know."

"Well, I'll see—Wednesday, p'rhaps, if I ain't too busy. I must go in now ; they're 'most through singing."

"Esther——"

"I don't believe I can stop any longer, Marcus."

"About the parasol—thank you jest the same if I don't take it. Of course you know I can't set out here holding a parasol ; folks would laugh. But I'm obliged to you all the same. Hope I didn't say anything to hurt your feelings ?"

"Oh no ; why, no, Marcus. Of course I don't want to make you take it if you don't want it. I don't know but it would look kinder queer, come to think of it. Oh dear ! they are through singing."

"Say, Esther, I don't know but I might as well take that parasol, if you'd jest as soon. The sun is pretty hot, an' I might get a headache. I forgot my umbrella, to tell the truth."

"I might have known better than to have

gone at him the way I did," thought Esther to herself, when she was seated at last in the cool church beside Margy. "Seems as if I might have got used to Marcus Woodman by this time."

She did not see him when she came out of church; but a little boy in the vestibule handed her the parasol, with the remark, "Mr. Woodman said for me to give this to you."

She and Margy passed down the street towards home. Going by the Baptist church, they noticed a young man standing by the entrance. He stared hard at Margy.

She began to laugh after they had passed him. "Did you see that fellow stare?" said she. "Hope he'll know me next time."

"That's George Elliot; he's that old lady's son you was speaking about this morning."

"Well, that's enough for me."

"He's a real good, steady young man."

Margy sniffed.

"P'rhaps you'll change your mind some day."

She did, and speedily, too. That glimpse of Margy Wilson's pretty, new face—for

she was a stranger in the town—had been too much for George Elliot. He obtained an introduction, and soon was a steady visitor at Esther Barney's house. Margy fell in love with him easily. She had never had much attention from the young men, and he was an engaging young fellow, small and bright-eyed, though with a nervous persistency like his mother's in his manner.

"I'm going to have it an understood thing," Margy told Esther, after her lover had become constant in his attentions, "that I'm going with George, and I ain't going with his mother. I can't bear that old woman."

But poor Margy found that it was not so easy to thrust determined old age off the stage, even when young Love was flying about so fast on his butterfly wings that he seemed to multiply himself, and there was no room for anything else, because the air was so full of Loves. That old mother, with her trailing black skirt and her wiry obstinacy, trotted as unwaveringly through the sweet stir as a ghost through a door.

One Monday morning Margy could not eat any breakfast, and there were tear-stains around her blue eyes.

"Why, what's the matter, Margy?" asked

Esther, eyeing her across the little kitchen-table.

"Nothing's the matter. I ain't hungry any to speak of, that's all. I guess I'll go right to work on Mis' Fuller's bonnet."

"I'd try an' eat something if I was you. Be sure you cut that velvet straight, if you go to work on it."

When the two were sitting together at their work in the little room back of the shop, Margy suddenly threw her scissors down. "There!" said she, "I've done it; I knew I should. I've cut this velvet bias. I knew I should cut everything bias I touched to-day."

There was a droll pucker on her mouth; then it began to quiver. She hid her face in her hands and sobbed. "Oh, dear, dear, dear!"

"Margy Wilson, what is the matter?"

"George and I—had a talk last night. We've broke the engagement, an' it's killing me. An' now I've cut this velvet bias. Oh, dear, dear, *dear*, dear!"

"For the land's sake, don't mind anything about the velvet. What's come betwixt you an' George?"

"His mother—horrid old thing! He said she'd got to live with us, and I said she

shouldn't. Then he said he wouldn't marry any girl that wasn't willing to live with his mother, and I said he wouldn't ever marry me, then. If George Elliot thinks more of his mother than he does of me, he can have her. I don't care. I'll show him I can get along without him."

"Well, I don't know, Margy. I'm real sorry about it. George Elliot's a good, likely young man; but if you didn't want to live with his mother, it was better to say so right in the beginning. And I don't know as I blame you much: she's pretty set in her ways."

"I guess she is. I never could bear her. I guess he'll find out——"

Margy dried her eyes defiantly, and took up the velvet again. "I've spoilt this velvet. I don't see why being disappointed in love should affect a girl so's to make her cut bias."

There was a whimsical element in Margy which seemed to roll uppermost along with her grief.

Esther looked a little puzzled. "Never mind the velvet, child: it ain't much, anyway." She began tossing over some ribbons to cover her departure from her usual reticence. "I'm real sorry about it, Margy.

Such things are hard to bear, but they can be lived through. I know something about it myself. You knew I'd had some of this kind of trouble, didn't you?"

"About Mr. Woodman, you mean?"

"Yes, about Marcus Woodman. I'll tell you what 'tis, Margy Wilson, you've got one thing to be thankful for, and that is that there ain't anything ridickerlous about this affair of yourn. That makes it the hardest of anything, according to my mind—when you know that everybody's laughing, and you can hardly help laughing yourself, though you feel 'most ready to die."

"Ain't that Mr. Woodman crazy?"

"No, he ain't crazy; he's got too much will for his common-sense, that's all, and the will teeters the sense a little too far into the air. I see all through it from the beginning. I could read Marcus Woodman jest like a book."

"I don't see how in the world you ever come to like such a man."

"Well, I s'pose love's the strongest wh there ain't any good reason for it. They it is. I can't say as I ever really adm Marcus Woodman much. I always see through him; but that didn't hinder thinking so much of him that I never f

if I could marry any other man. And I've had chances, though I shouldn't want you to say so."

"You turned him off because he went to sitting on the church steps?"

"Course I did. Do you s'pose I was going to marry a man who made a laughing-stock of himself that way?"

"I don't see how he ever come to do it. It's the funniest thing I ever heard of."

"I know it. It seems so silly nobody'd believe it. Well, all there is about it, Marcus Woodman's got so much mulishness in him it makes him almost miraculous. You see, he got up an' spoke in that church meeting when they had such a row about Mr. Morton's being settled here—Marcus was awful set again' him. I never could see any reason why, and I don't think he could. He said Mr. Morton wa'n't doctrinal; that was what they all said; but I don't believe half of 'em knew what doctrinal was. I never could see why Mr. Morton wa'n't as good as most ministers—enough sight better than them that treated him so, anyway. I always felt that they was really setting him in a pulpit high over their heads by using him the way they did, though they didn't know it.

"Well, Marcus spoke in that church meeting, an' he kept getting more and more set every word he said. He always had a way of saying things over and over, as if he was making steps out of 'em, an' raising of himself up on 'em, till there was no moving him at all. And he did that night. Finally, when he was up real high, he said, as for him, if Mr. Morton was settled over that church, he'd never go inside the door himself as long as he lived. Somebody spoke out then—I never quite knew who 'twas, though I suspected—an' says, 'You'll have to set on the steps, then, Brother Woodman.'

"Everybody laughed at that but Marcus. He didn't see nothing to laugh at. He spoke out awful set, kinder gritting his teeth, 'I will set on the steps fifty years before I'll go into this house if that man's settled here.'

"I couldn't believe he'd really do it. We were going to be married that spring, an' it did seem as if he might listen to me; but he wouldn't. The Sunday Mr. Morton begun to preach, he begun to set on them steps, an' he's set there ever since, in all kinds of weather. It's a wonder it 'ain't killed him; but I guess it's made him tough "

"Why, didn't he feel bad when you wouldn't marry him?"

"Feel bad? Of course he did. He took on terribly. But it didn't make any difference; he wouldn't give in a hair's-breadth. I declare it did seem as if I should die. His mother felt awfully too—she's a real good woman. I don't know what Marcus would have done without her. He wants a sight of tending and waiting on; he's dreadful babyish in some ways, though you wouldn't think it.

"Well, it's all over now, as far as I'm concerned. I've got over it a good deal, though sometimes it makes me jest as mad as ever to see him setting there. But I try to be reconciled, and I get along jest as well mebbe, as if I'd had him—I don't know. I fretted more at first than there was any sense in, and I hope you won't."

"I ain't going to fret at all, Miss Barney. I may cut bias for a while, but I sha'n't do anything worse."

"How you do talk, child!"

A good deal of it was talk with Margy; she had not as much courage as her words proclaimed. She was capable of a strong temporary resolution, but of no enduring one. She gradually weakened as the days

without her lover went on, and one Saturday night she succumbed entirely. There was quite a rush of business, but through it all she caught a conversation between some customers—two pretty young girls.

"Who was that with you last night at the concert?"

"That—oh, that was George Elliot. Didn't you know him?"

"He's got another girl," thought Margy, with a great throb.

The next Sunday night, coming out of meeting with Miss Barney, she left her suddenly. George Elliot was one of a waiting line of young men in the vestibule. She went straight up to him. He looked at her in bewilderment, his dark face turning red.

"Good evening, Miss Wilson," he stammered out finally.

"Good evening," she whispered, and stood looking up at him piteously. She was white and trembling.

At last he stepped forward suddenly and offered her his arm. In spite of his resentment, he could not put her to open shame before all his mates, who were staring curiously.

When they were out in the dark, cool

street, he bent over her. "Why, Margy, what does all this mean?"

"O George, let her live with us, please. I want her to. I know I can get along with her if I try. I'll do everything I can. Please let her live with us."

"Who's *her*?"

"Your mother."

"And I suppose *us* is you and I? I thought that was all over, Margy; ain't it?"

"O George, I am sorry I treated you so."

"And you are willing to let mother live with us now?"

"I'll do anything. O George!"

"Don't cry, Margy. There—nobody's looking—give us a kiss. It's been a long time; ain't it, dear? So you've made up your mind that you're willing to let mother live with us?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't believe she ever will, Margy. She's about made up her mind to go and live with my brother Edward, whether or no. So you won't be troubled with her. I dare say she might have been a little of a trial as she grew older."

"You didn't tell me."

"I thought it was your place to give in, dear."

"Yes, it was, George."

"I'm mighty glad you did. I tell you what it is, dear, I don't know how you've felt, but I've been pretty miserable lately."

"Poor George!"

They passed Esther Barney's house, and strolled along half a mile further. When they returned, and Margy stole softly into the house and upstairs, it was quite late, and Esther had gone to bed. Margy saw the light was not out in her room, so she peeped in. She could not wait till morning to tell her.

"Where have you been?" said Esther, looking up at her out of her pillows.

"Oh, I went to walk a little way with George."

"Then you've made up?"

"Yes."

"Is his mother going to live with you?"

"No; I guess not. She's going to live with Edward. But I told him I was willing she should. I've about made up my mind it's a woman's place to give in mostly. I s'pose you think I'm an awful fool."

"No, I don't; no, I don't, Margy. I'm real glad it's all right betwixt you and George. I've seen you weren't very happy lately."

They talked a little longer ; then Margy said "Good night," going over to Esther and kissing her. Being so rich in love made her generous with it. She looked down sweetly into the older woman's thin, red-cheeked face. "I wish you were as happy as I," said she. "I wish you and Mr. Woodman could make up too."

"That's an entirely different matter. I couldn't give in in such a thing as that."

Margy looked at her ; she was not subtle, but she had just come out triumphant through innocent love and submission, and used the wisdom she had gained thereby.

"Don't you believe," said she, "if you was to give in the way I did, that he would?"

Esther started up with an astonished air. That had never occurred to her before. "Oh, I don't believe he would. You don't know him ; he's awful set. Besides, I don't know but I'm better off the way it is."

In spite of herself, however, she could not help thinking of Margy's suggestion. Would he give in? She was hardly disposed to run the risk. With her peculiar cast of mind, her feeling for the ludicrous so keen that it almost amounted to a special sense, and her sensitiveness to ridicule, it would have been easier for her to have married a man under

the shadow of a crime than one who was the deserving target of gibes and jests. Besides, she told herself, it was possible that he had changed his mind, that he no longer cared for her. How could she make the first overtures? She had not Margy's impulsiveness and innocence of youth to excuse her.

Also, she was partly influenced by the reason which she had given Margy: she was not so very sure that it would be best for her to take any such step. She was more fixed in the peace and pride of her old maidenhood than she had realised, and was more shy of disturbing it. Her comfortable meals, her tidy housekeeping, and her prosperous work had become such sources of satisfaction to her that she was almost wedded to them, and jealous of any interference.

So it is doubtful if there would have been any change in the state of affairs if Marcus Woodman's mother had not died towards spring. Esther was greatly distressed about it.

"I don't see what Marcus is going to do," she told Margy. "He ain't any fitter to take care of himself than a baby, and he won't have any housekeeper, they say."

One evening, after Marcus's mother had been dead about three weeks, Esther went

over there. Margy had gone out to walk with George, so nobody knew. When she reached the house—a white cottage on a hill—she saw a light in the kitchen window.

“He’s there,” said she. She knocked on the door softly. Marcus shuffled over to it—he was in his stocking feet—and opened it.

“Good evening, Marcus,” said she, speaking first.

“Good evening.”

“I hadn’t anything special to do this evening, so I thought I’d look in a minute and see how you was getting along.”

“I ain’t getting along very well; but I’m glad to see you. Come right in.”

When she was seated opposite him by the kitchen fire, she surveyed him and his surroundings pityingly. Everything had an abject air of forlornness; there was neither tidiness nor comfort. After a few words she rose energetically. “See here, Marcus,” said she, “you jest fill up that tea-kettle, and I’m going to slick up here a little for you while I stay.”

“Now, Esther, I don’t feel as if——”

“Don’t you say nothing. Here’s the tea-kettle. I might jest as well be doing that as setting still.”

He watched her, in a way that made her

nervous, as she flew about putting things to rights; but she said to herself that this was easier than sitting still, and gradually leading up to the object for which she had come. She kept wondering if she could ever accomplish it. When the room was in order, finally, she sat down again, with a strained-up look in her face.

"Marcus," said she, "I might as well begin. There was something I wanted to say to you to-night."

He looked at her, and she went on—

"I've been thinking some lately about how matters used to be betwixt you an' me, and it's jest possible—I don't know—but I might have been a little more patient than I was. I don't know as I'd feel the same way now if——"

"O Esther, what do you mean?"

"I ain't going to tell you, Marcus Woodman, if you can't find out. I've said full enough; more'n I ever thought I should."

He was an awkward man, but he rose and threw himself on his knees at her feet with all the grace of complete unconsciousness of action. "O Esther, you don't mean, do you?—you don't mean that you'd be willing to—marry me?"

‘No ; not if you don’t get up. You look ridickerlous.”

“Esther, do you mean it?”

“Yes. Now get up.”

“You ain’t thinking—I can’t give up what we had the trouble about, any more now than I could then.”

“Ain’t I said once that wouldn’t make any difference?”

At that he put his head down on her knees and sobbed.

“Do, for mercy sake, stop. Somebody’ll be coming in. ’Tain’t as if we was a young couple.”

“I ain’t going to till I’ve told you about it, Esther. You ’ain’t never really understood. In the first of it, we was both mad ; but we ain’t now, and we can talk it over. O Esther, I’ve had such an awful life ! I’ve looked at you, and—— Oh, dear, dear, dear !”

“Marcus, you scare me to death crying so.”

“I won’t. Esther, look here—it’s the gospel truth : I ’ain’t a thing again’ Mr. Morton now.”

“Then why on earth don’t you go into the meeting-house and behave yourself ?

“Don’t you suppose I would if I could ? I can’t, Esther—I can’t.”

"I don't know what you mean by can't."

"Do you s'pose I've took any comfort sitting there on them steps in the winter snows an' the summer suns? Do you s'pose I've took any comfort not marrying you? Don't you s'pose I'd given all I was worth any time the last ten year to have got up an' walked into the church with the rest of the folks?"

"Well, I'll own, Marcus, I don't see why you couldn't if you wanted to."

"I ain't sure as I see myself, Esther. All I know is I can't make myself give it up. I can't. I ain't made strong enough to."

"As near as I can make out, you've taken to sitting on the church steps the way other men take to smoking and drinking."

"I don't know but you're right, Esther, though I hadn't thought of it in that way before."

"Well, you must try to overcome it."

"I never can, Esther. It ain't right for me to let you think I can."

"Well we won't talk about it any more to-night. It's time I was going home."

"Esther—did you mean it?"

"Mean what?"

"That you'd marry me any way?"

"Yes, I did. Now do get up. I do hate to see you looking so silly."

Esther had a new pearl-coloured silk gown, and a little mantle like it, and a bonnet trimmed with roses and plumes, and she and Marcus were married in June.

The Sunday on which she came out a bride they were late at church; but late as it was, curious people were lingering by the steps to watch them. What would they do? Would Marcus Woodman enter that church door which his awful will had guarded for him so long?

They walked slowly up the steps between the watching people. When they came to the place where he was accustomed to sit, Marcus stopped short and looked down at his wife with an agonised face.

"O Esther, I've—got—to stop."

"Well, we'll both sit down here, then."

"*You?*"

"Yes; I'm willing."

"No; you go in."

"No, Marcus; I sit with you on our wedding Sunday."

Her sharp middle-aged face as she looked up at him was fairly heroic. This was all that she could do: her last weapon was used. If this failed, she would accept the

chances with which she had married, & before the eyes of all these tittering people she would sit down at his side on the church steps. She was determined, and would not weaken.

He stood for a moment staring into his face. He trembled so that the bystanders noticed it. He actually leaned over toward his old seat as if wire ropes were pulling him down upon it. Then he stood up straight like a man, and walked through the church door with his wife.

The people followed. Not one of them even smiled. They had felt the pathos of the comedy.

The sitters in the pews watched Mark wonderingly as he went up the aisle with Esther. He looked strange to them; had almost the grand mien of a conqueror.

A PATIENT WAITER.

“**B**E sure you sweep it clean, Lily.”
“Yes, 'm. I ain't leavin' a single stone on it.”

“I'm 'most afraid to trust you. I think likely as not he may come to-day, an' not wait to write. It's so pleasant, I feel jest as if somebody was comin'.”

“I'm a-sweepin' it real clean, Aunt Fidelia.”

“Well, be pertickler. An' you'd better sweep the side-walk a little ways in front of the yard. I saw a lot of loose stones on it yesterday.”

“Yes, 'm.”

The broom was taller than the child, but she was sturdy, and she wielded it with joyful vigour. Down the narrow path between the rows of dahlias she went. Her smooth yellow head shone in the sun. Her long blue gingham apron whisked about her legs as she swept.

The dahlias were in full bloom, and they nodded their golden and red balls gently

when the child jostled them. Beyond the dahlias on either side were zinnias and candytuft and marigolds. The house was very small. There was only one window at the side of the front door. A curved green trellis stood against the little space of house wall on the other side, and a yellow honeysuckle climbed on it.

Fidelia Almy stood in the door with a cloth in her hand. She had been dusting the outside of the door and the threshold, rubbing off every speck punctiliously.

Fidelia stood there in the morning light with her head nodding like a flower in a wind. It nodded so all the time. She had a disease of the nerves. Her yellow-grey hair was crimped, and put up carefully in a little coil, with two long curls on either side. Her long delicate face, which always had a downward droop as it nodded, had a soft polish like ivory.

When Lily Almy, who was Fidelia's orphan niece, whom she was bringing up, had reached the gate with her broom, she peered down the road ; then she ran back eagerly.

"O Aunt Fidelia," she said, in a precise slow voice, which was copied from her aunt's, "there's a man comin'. Do you s'pose it's him?"

"What kind of a lookin' man?" Fidelia's head nodded faster; a bright red spot gleamed out on either cheek.

"A real handsome man. He's tall, and he's got reddish whiskers. And he's got a carpet bag."

"That's the way he looks."

"O Aunt Fidelia, do you s'pose it's him?"

"'Tain't very likely to be."

"Here he is."

Fidelia ran into the house, and knelt down by the parlour window, just peering over the sill. Her whole body seemed wavering like her head; her breath came in great gasps. The man, who was young and handsome, walked past.

Lily ran in. "'Twa'n't him, was it?" said she.

"I didn't much expect it was. I've always thought he'd come on a Tuesday. I've dreamed 'bout his comin' Tuesday more times than I can tell. Now I'm goin' to fix the flowers in the vases, and then I'm goin' down to the post-office. I feel jest as if I might git a letter to-day. There was one in the candle last night."

Fidelia moved, nodding, among her flowers in her front yard. She gathered up her purple calico apron, and cut the flowers into it.

"You run out into the garden an' git some sparrow-grass for green," she told Lily, "an' pick some of that striped grass under the parlour window, an' some of them spider-lilies by the fence."

The little white-painted mantel-shelf in Fidelia's parlour was like an altar, upon which she daily heaped floral offerings. And who knows what fair deity in bright clouds she saw when she made her sacrifice?

Fidelia had only two vases, tall gilt-and-white china ones, with scrolling tops; these stood finely in the centre, holding their drooping nosegays. Beside these were broken china bowls, cream-jugs without handles, tumblers, wine-glasses, saucers, and one smart china mug with "Friendship's Offering" in gold letters. Slightly withered flowers were in all of them. Fidelia threw them out, and filled all the vessels with fresh ones. The green asparagus sprays brushed the shelf, the striped grass overtopped the gay flowers.

"There," said Fidelia, "now I'm goin' to the post-office."

"If anybody comes, I'll ask him in here, an' tell him you'll be right back, sha'n't I?" said Lily.

"Tell him I'll be back in jest a few

minutes, an' give him the big rockin'-chair."

The post-office was a mile away, in the corner of a country store. Twice a day, year out and year in, Fidelia journeyed thither.

"It's only Fidelia Almy," people said, looking out of the windows, as the poor solitary figure with its nodding head went by through summer suns and winter winds.

Once in a while they hailed her. "See if there's anything for me, won't you, Fidelia?"

At last it was an understood thing that Fidelia should carry the mail to the dozen families between her house and the post-office. She often had her black worked bag filled up with letters, but there was never one of her own. Fidelia Almy never had a letter.

"That woman's been comin' here the last thirty years," the postmaster told a stranger one day, "an' she 'ain't never had a letter sence I've been here, an' I don't believe she ever did before."

Fidelia used to come in a little before the mail was distributed, and sit on an old settee near the door, waiting. Her face at those times had a wild, strained look; but

after the letters were all in the boxes it settled back into its old expression, and she travelled away with her bag of other people's letters, nodding patiently.

On her route was one young girl who had a lover in a neighbouring town. Her letters came regularly. She used to watch for Fidelia, and run to meet her, her pretty face all blushes. Fidelia always had the letter separated from the others, and ready for her. She always smiled when she held it out. "They keep a-comin'," she said one day, "an' there don't seem to be no end to it. But if I was you, Louisa, I'd try an' git him to settle over here, if you ain't married before long. There's slips, an' it ain't always safe trustin' to letters."

The girl told her lover what Fidelia had said, with tender laughter and happy pity. "Poor thing!" she said. "She had a beau, you know, Willy, and he went away thirty years ago, and ever since then she's been looking for a letter from him, and she's kind of cracked over it. And she's afraid it'll turn out the same way with me."

Then she and her sweetheart laughed together at the idea of this sad, foolish destiny for this pretty, courageous young thing.

To-day Fidelia, with her black broadcloth

bag, worked on one side with a wreath and on the other with a bunch of flowers, walked slowly to the office and back. As the years went on she walked slower. This double journey of hers seemed to tire her more. Once in a while she would sit down and rest on the stone wall. The clumps of dusty wayside flowers, meadowsweet and tansy, stood around her; over her head was the blue sky. But she clutched her black letter-bag, and nodded her drooping head, and never looked up. Her sky was elsewhere.

When she came in sight of her own house, Lily, who was watching at the gate, came running to meet her.

"O Aunt Fidelia," said she, "Aunt Sally's in there."

"Did she take off her shoes an' let you brush 'em before she went in?"

"She wouldn't. She went right straight in. She jest laughed when I asked her to take her shoes off. An', Aunt Fidelia, she's done somethin' else. I couldn't help it."

"What?"

"She's been eatin' some of Mr. Lennox's plumcake up. I couldn't stop her, Aunt Fidelia. I told her she mus'n't."

"You didn't say nothin' 'bout Mr. Lennox, did you?"

"No, I didn't, Aunt Fidelia. Oh, did you get a letter?"

"No; I didn't much think I would to-day. Oh dear! there's Sally eatin' cake right in the front entry."

A stout old woman, with a piece of cake in her hand, stood in the front door as Fidelia and Lily came up between the dahlias.

"How d'ye do, Fidelia?" cried she warmly.

"Pretty well, thank you. How do you do, Sally?" Fidelia answered. She shook hands, and looked at the other with a sort of meek uneasiness. "Hadn't you jest as soon step out here whilst you're eatin' that cake?" asked she timidly. "I've jest swept the entry."

"No; I ain't goin' to step out there an inch," said the other, mumbling the cake vigorously between her old jaws. "If you ain't the worst old maid, Fidelia! Ain't seen all the sister you've got in the world for a year, an' wantin' her to go outdoors to eat a piece of cake. Hard work to git the cake, too."

"It don't make any difference," said Fidelia. "I'm real kind o' used up every time I sweep nowadays, that's all."

"Better stop sweepin', then; there ain't no need of so much fussin'. It's more'n half that's got your nerves out of kilter—sweepin' an' scrubbin' from mornin' till night, an' wantin' folks to take off their shoes before they come in, as if they was goin' into a heathen temple. Well, I ain't goin' to waste all my breath scoldin' when I've come over to see you. How air you now, Fidelia?"

"I'm 'bout the same as ever." Fidelia, following her sister into the parlour, stooped shyly to pick up some crumbs which had fallen on the entry floor.

"Just as shaky, ain't you? Why, Fidelia Almy, what in creation have you got this room rigged up so fur?"

"Rigged up how?"

"Why, everything covered up this way. What hev you got this old sheet over the carpet fur?"

"It was fadin' dreadfully."

"Fadin'! Good land! If you ain't got every chair sewed up in caliker, an' the pictures in old piller-cases, an'—— Fidelia Almy, if you ain't got the solar lamp a-settin' in a little bag!"

"The gilt was gittin' real kind o' tarnished."

“Tarnished ! An’ every single thing on the table—the chiner card-basket an’ Mrs. Hemans’ *Poems* pinned up in a white rag ! Good land ! Well, I’ve always heard tell that there was two kinds of old maids—old maids an’ consarned old maids—an’ I guess you’re one of the last sort. Why, what air you cuttin’ on so fur ?”

Fidelia gathered up all her trembling meekness and weakness into a show of dignity. “Things are all fadin’ and wearin’ out, an’ I want to keep ’em decent as long as I last. I ain’t got no money to buy any more. I ain’t got no husband nor sons to do for me, like you, an’ I’ve got to take care of things if I hev anything. An’—I’m goin’ to.”

Her sister laughed. “Well, good land ! I don’t care. Cover up your things if you want to. There ain’t no need of your gittin’ riled. But this room does look enough to make a cat laugh. All them flowers on the mantel, an’ all those white things. I declare, Fidelia Almy, it does look jest as if ’twas laid out. Well, we won’t talk no more about it. I’m goin’ out to hev a cup of tea. I put the teapot on, an’ started the fire.”

Poor Fidelia had a distressing day with her visiting sister. All her prim household

arrangements were examined and commented on. Not a closet nor bureau drawer escaped inspection. When the guest departed, at length, the woman and the child looked at each other with relief.

"Ain't you glad she's gone?" asked Lily. She had been pink with indignation all day.

"Hush, child; you mustn't. She's my sister, an' I'm always glad to see her, if she is a little tryin' sometimes."

"She wanted you to take the covers off an' let the things git spoiled before Mr. Lennox comes, didn't she?"

"She don't know nothin' about that."

"Are you goin' to make another plum-cake to-night, Aunt Fidelia?"

"I don' know. I guess we'd better sweep first."

The two worked hard and late that night. They swept every inch of floor which that profane dusty foot had trod. The child helped eagerly. She was Fidelia's confidante, and she repaid her confidence with the sweetest faith and sympathy. Nothing could exceed her innocent trust in Fidelia's pathetic story and pathetic hopes. This sad human experience was her fairy tale of childhood. That recreant lover, Ansel Len-

nox, who had left his sweetheart for California thirty years ago, and promised falsely to write and return, was her fairy prince. Her bright imagination pictured him beautiful as a god.

"He was about as handsome a young man as you ever see," said poor Fidelia. And a young Apollo towered up before Lily's credulous eyes. The lapse of thirty years affected the imagination of neither; but Lily used to look at her aunt reflectively sometimes.

"I wish you could have some medicine to make you stop shakin' before that handsome Mr. Lennox comes," she said once.

"I'm in hopes that medicine I'm takin' will stop it," said Fidelia. "I think, mebbe, it's a little better now. I'm glad I thought 'o put that catnip in; it makes it a good deal more quietin'."

On the narrow ledge of shelf behind Fidelia's kitchen sink stood always a blue quart bottle of medicine. She prepared it herself from roots and herbs. She experimented and added new ingredients, and swallowed it with a touching faith that it would cure her. Beside this bottle stood another of sage tea; that was for her hair. She used it plentifully every day in the hope

that it would stop the grey hairs coming, and bring back the fine colour. Fidelia used to have pretty golden hair.

Lily teased her to make the sage tea stronger. "You've been usin' it a dreadful long time, Aunt Fidelia," said she, "an your hair's jest as grey as 'twas before."

"Takes quite a long time before you can see any difference," said Fidelia.

Many a summer morning, when the dew was heavy, she and Lily used to steal out early and bathe their faces in it. Fidelia said it would make people rosy and keep away the wrinkles.

"It works better on me than it does on you, don't it?" asked pink-and-white Lily, innocently, once. The two were out in the shining white field together. The morning lit up Lily as it did the flowers. Her eyes had lovely blue sparkles in them; her yellow hair, ruffled by the wind, glittered as radiantly between one and the light as the cob-web lines across the grasses. She looked wonderingly at her aunt, with her nodding grey head, plunging her little yellow hands into the dewy green things. Those dull tints and white hairs and wrinkles showed forth so plainly in the clear light that even the child's charming faith was disturbed a

little. Would the dew ever make this old creature pretty again ?

But—"You can't expect it to work in a minute," replied Fidelia, cheerfully. And Lily was satisfied.

"I guess it'll work by the time Mr. Lennox comes," she said.

Fidelia was always neat and trim in her appearance, her hair was always carefully arranged, and her shoes tidy ; but summer and winter she wore one sort of gown—a purple calico. She had a fine black silk hung away in the closet upstairs. She had one or two good woollens, and some delicate cambrics. There was even one white muslin, with some lace in neck and sleeves, hanging there. But she never wore one of them. Her sister scolded her for it, and other people wondered. Fidelia's child-confidante alone knew the reason why. This poor, nodding, enchanted princess was saving her gay attire till the prince returned and the enchantment ceased, and she was beautiful again.

"You mustn't say nothin' about it," Fidelia had said ; "but I ain't goin' to put on them good dresses an' tag 'em right out. Mebbe the time'll come when I'll want 'em more."

"Mr. Lennox'll think that black silk

is beautiful," said Lily, "an' that white muslin."

"I had that jest after he went away, an' I 'ain't never put it on. I thought I wouldn't; muslin don't look half so nice after the new look gits off it."

So Lily waited all through her childhood. She watched her aunt start forth on her daily pilgrimages to the post-office, with the confident expectation that one of these days she would return with a letter from Mr. Lennox. She regarded that sacred loaf of plum-cake which was always kept on hand, and believed that he might appear to dispose of it at any moment. She had the sincerest faith that the time was coming when the herb medicine would quiet poor Fidelia's tremulous head, when the sage tea would turn all the grey hairs gold, and the dew would make her yellow, seamy cheeks smooth and rosy, when she would put on that magnificent black silk or that dainty girlish muslin, and sit in the parlour with Mr. Lennox, and have the covers off the chairs and the mantel-piece blooming with flowers.

So the child and the woman lived happily with their beautiful chimera, until gradually he vanished into thin air for one of them.

Lily could not have told when the conviction first seized her that Mr. Lennox would never write, would never come; that Aunt Fidelia's grey hair would never turn gold, nor her faded cheeks be rosy; that her nodding head would nod until she was dead.

It was hardly until she was a woman herself, and had a lover of her own. It is possible that he gave the final overthrow to her faith, that it had not entirely vanished before. She told him all about Mr. Lennox. She scarcely looked upon it as a secret to be kept now. She had ascertained that many people were acquainted with Fidelia Almy's poor romance, except in its minor details.

So Lily told her lover. "Good Lord!" he said. "How long is it since he went?"

"Forty years now," said Lily. They were walking home from meeting one Sunday night.

"Forty years! Why, there ain't any more chance of hearing anything from him——. Did he have any folks here?"

"No. He was a clerk in a store here. He fell in love with Aunt Fidelia, and went off to California to get some more money before he got married."

"Didn't anybody ever hear anything from him?"

"Aunt Fidelia always said not; but Aunt Sally told me once that she knew well enough that he got married out there right after he went away; she said she heard it pretty straight. She never had any patience with Aunt Fidelia. If she'd known half the things—— Poor Aunt Fidelia! She's getting worse lately. She goes to the post-office Sundays. I can't stop her. Every single Sunday, before meeting, down she goes."

"Why, she can't get in."

"I know it. She just tries the door, and comes back again."

"Why, dear, she's crazy, ain't she?"

"No, she ain't crazy; she's rational enough about everything else. All the way I can put it is, she's just been pointed one way all her life, and going one way, and now she's getting nearer the end of the road, she's pointed sharper and she's going faster. She's had a hard time. I'm going to do all I can for her, anyhow. I'll help her get ready for Mr. Lennox as long as she lives."

Fidelia took great delight in Lily's love affair. All that seemed to trouble her was

the suspicion that the young man might leave town, and the pair be brought to letter-writing.

"You mind, Lily," she would say, "don't you let Valentine settle anywhere else before you're married. If you do, you'll have to come to writin' letters, an' letters ain't to be depended on. There's slips. You'd get sick of waitin' the way I have. I 'ain't minded it much; but you're young, an' it would be different."

When Valentine Rowe did find employment in a town fifty miles away, poor Fidelia seemed to have taken upon herself a double burden of suspense.

In those days she was much too early for the mails, and waited, breathless, in the office for hours. When she got a letter for Lily she went home radiant; she seemed to forget her own disappointment.

Lily's letters came regularly for a long time. Valentine came to see her occasionally too. Then, one day, when Lily expected a letter, it did not come. Her aunt dragged herself home feebly.

"It 'ain't come, Lily," said she. "The trouble's begun. You poor child, how air you goin' to go through with it?"

Lily laughed. "Why, Aunt Fidelia!"

said she, "what are you worrying for? I haven't missed a letter before. Something happened so Valentine couldn't write Sunday, that's all. It don't trouble me a mite."

However, even Lily was troubled at length. Weeks went by, and no letter came from Valentine Rowe. Fidelia tottered home despondent day after day. The girl had a brave heart, but she began to shudder, watching her. She felt as if she were looking into her own destiny.

"I'm going to write to Valentine," she said suddenly, one day, after Fidelia had returned from her bootless journey.

Fidelia looked at her fiercely. "Lily Almy," said she, "whatever else you do, don't you do that. Don't you force yourself on any feller, when there's a chance you ain't wanted. Don't you do anything that ain't modest. You'd better live the way I've done."

"He may be sick," said Lily pitifully.

"The folks he's with would write. Don't you write a word. I didn't write. An' mebbe you'll hear to-morrow. I guess we'd better sweep the parlour to-day."

This new anxiety seemed to wear on Fidelia more than her own had done. She

now talked more about Valentine Rowe than Mr. Lennox. Her faith in Lily's case did not seem as active as in her own.

"I wouldn't go down to the post-office, seems to me," Lily said one morning—Fidelia tottered going out the door; "you don't look fit to. I'll go by an' by."

"I can go well enough," said Fidelia, in her feeble, shrill voice. "You ain't goin' to begin as long as I can help it." And she crawled slowly out of the yard between the rows of dahlias, and down the road, her head nodding, her flabby black bag hanging at her side.

That was the last time she ever went to the post-office. That day she returned with her patient, disappointed heart for the last time.

When poor Fidelia Almy left her little house again she went riding, lying quietly, her nodding head still for ever. She had passed out of that strong wind of Providence, which had tossed her so hard, into the eternal calm. She rode past the post-office on her way to the little green graveyard, and never knew nor cared whether there was a letter for her or not. But the bell tolled, and the summer air was soft and sweet, and the little funeral train passed

by; and may be there was one among the fair, wide possibilities of heaven.

The first day on which Fidelia gave up going to the post-office, Lily began going in her stead. In the morning Fidelia looked up at her pitifully from her pillow, when she found that she could not rise.

"You'll have to go to the office, Lily," she whispered; "an' you'd better hurry, or you'll be late for the mail."

That was the constant cry to which the poor girl had to listen. It was always, "Hurry, hurry, or you'll be late for the mail."

Lily was a sweet, healthy young thing, but the contagion of this strained faith and expectation seemed to seize upon her in her daily tramps to the post-office. Sometimes, going along the road, she could hardly believe herself not to be the veritable Fidelia Almy, living life over again, beginning a new watch for her lost lover's letter. She put her hand to her head to see if it nodded. She kept whispering to herself, "Hurry, hurry, or you'll be late for the mail."

Fidelia lay ill a week before she died, and the week had nearly gone, when Lily flew home from the office one night jubilant. She ran in to the sick woman. "O

Aunt Fidelia!" she cried, "the letter's come!"

Fidelia had not raised herself for days, but she sat up now erect. All her failing forces seemed to gather themselves up and flash and beat, now the lifeward wind for them blew. The colour came into her cheeks, her eyes shone triumphant. "Ansel's—letter!"

Lily sobbed right out in the midst of her joy: "O poor Aunt Fidelia! poor Aunt Fidelia! I didn't think—I forgot. I was awful cruel. It's a letter from Valentine. He's been sick. The folks wrote, but they put on the wrong state—Massachusetts instead of Vermont. He's comin' right home, an' he's goin' to stay. He's goin' to settle here. Poor Aunt Fidelia! I didn't think."

Fidelia lay back on her pillow. "You dear child," she whispered, "you won't have to."

Valentine Rowe came the morning of the day on which she died. She eagerly demanded to see him.

"You're a-goin' to settle here, ain't you?" she asked him. "Don't you go away again before you're married; don't you do it. It ain't safe trustin' to letters; there's slips."

The young man looked down at her with tears in his honest eyes. "I'll settle here sure," said he. "Don't you worry. I'll promise you."

Fidelia looked up at him, and shut her eyes peacefully. "The dear child!" she murmured.

Along the middle of the afternoon she called Lily. She wanted her to put her head down, so she could tell her something.

"Them dresses," she whispered, "upstairs. You'd better take 'em an' use 'em. You can make that white one over for a weddin' dress. An' you'd better take the covers off the things in the parlour when you're married, an'—eat the plumcake."

Near sunset she called Lily again. "The evenin' mail," she whispered. "It's time for it. You'd better hurry, or you'll be late. I shouldn't be—a bit—surprised if the letter came to-night."

Lily broke down and cried. "O dear, poor aunty!" she sobbed. The awful pitifulness of it all seemed to overwhelm her suddenly. She could keep up no longer.

But Fidelia did not seem to notice it. She went on talking. "Ansel Lennox—promised he'd write when he went away, an' he said he'd come again. It's time for

the evenin' mail. You 'd better hurry, or you 'll be late. He—promised he 'd write, an' "—she looked up at Lily suddenly; a look of triumphant resolution came into her poor face—" *I ain't goin' to give it up yet.*"

A CONQUEST OF HUMILITY.

TWO o'clock had been the hour set for the wedding. It was now four, and the bridegroom had not yet appeared. The relatives who had been bidden to the festivities had been waiting impatiently in the two square front rooms of Maria Caldwell's house, but now some had straggled out into the front yard, from which they could look up the road to better advantage.

They were talking excitedly. A shrill feminine babble, with an undertone of masculine bass, floated about the house and yard. It had been swelling in volume from a mere whisper for the last half-hour—ever since Hiram Caldwell had set out for the bridegroom's house to ascertain the reason for his tardiness at his own wedding.

Hiram, who was a young fellow, had gotten into his shiny buggy with a red, important face, and driven off at a furious rate. He was own cousin to Delia Caldwell, the prospective bride. All the people assembled were Thayers or Caldwells, or

connections thereof. The tardy bridegroom's name was Lawrence Thayer.

It was a beautiful summer afternoon. The air was hot and sweet. Around the Caldwell house it was spicy sweet with pinks ; there was a great bed of them at the foot of the green bank which extended under the front windows.

Some of the women and young girls pulled pinks and sniffed them as they stood waiting. Mrs. Erastus Thayer had stuck two or three in the bosom of her cinnamon-brown silk dress. She stood beside the gate ; occasionally she craned her neck over it and peered down the road. The sun was hot upon her silken shoulders, the horizontal wrinkles shone, but she did not mind.

"See anything of him?" some one called out.

"No. I'm dreadful afraid somethin' has happened."

"O mother, what do you think's happened?" asked a young girl at her side, hitting her with a sharp elbow. The girl was young, slim, and tall ; she stooped a little ; her pointed elbows showed redly through her loose white muslin sleeves ; her face was pretty.

"Hush, child! I don't know," said her mother.

The girl stood staring at her with helpless, awed eyes.

At last the woman in cinnamon-brown silk turned excitedly about. "He's comin'!" she proclaimed, in a shrill whisper.

The whisper passed from one to another.

"He's coming!" everybody repeated. Heads crowded together at the window; all the company was in motion.

"It ain't Lawrence," said a woman's voice disappointedly. "It ain't nobody but his father with Hiram."

"Somethin' *has happened*," repeated Mrs. Thayer. The young girl trembled and caught hold of her mother's dress; her eyes grew big and wild. Hiram Caldwell drove up the road. He met the gaze of the people with a look of solemn embarrassment. But he was not so important as he had been. There was a large, white-headed old man with him, who drew the larger share of attention. He got lumberingly out of the buggy when Hiram drew rein at the gate. Then he proceeded up the gravel walk to the house. The people stood back and stared. No one dared speak to him except Mrs. Erastus Thayer. She darted

before him in the path ; her brown silk skirts swished.

" Mr. Thayer," cried she, " what is the matter ? Do tell us ! What has happened ?"

" Where's Delia ?" said the old man.

" Oh, she's in the bedroom out of the parlour. She 'ain't been out yet. Mr. Thayer, for mercy's sake, what is the matter ? What has happened to him ?"

David Thayer waved her aside, and kept straight on, his long yellow face immovable, his gaunt old shoulders resolutely braced, through the parlour, and knocked at the bedroom door.

A nervously shaking woman in black silk opened it. She screamed when she saw him. " O Mr. Thayer, it's you ! What is the matter ? where is he ?" she gasped, clutching his arm.

A young woman in a pearl-coloured silk gown stood, straight and silent, behind her. She had a tall, full figure, and there was something grand in her attitude. She stood like a young pine-tree, as if she had all necessary elements of support in her own self. Her features were strong and fine. She would have been handsome if her complexion had been better. Her skin was thick and dull.

She did not speak, but stood looking at David Thayer. Her mouth was shut tightly, her eyes steady. She might have been braced to meet a wind.

There were several other women in the little room. Mr. Thayer looked at them uneasily. "I want to see Delia an' her mother, an' nobody else," said he finally.

The women started and looked at each other; they then left. The old man closed the door after them and turned to Delia.

Her mother had begun to cry. "Oh dear! oh dear!" she wailed. "I knew somethin' dreadful had happened."

"Delia," said he, "I don't know what you're goin' to say. It ain't very pleasant for me to tell you. I wish this minute Lawrence Thayer didn't belong to me. But that don't better matters any. He does, an' somebody's got to tell you."

"Oh, is he dead?" asked Delia's mother brokenly.

"No, he ain't dead," said the old man; "an' he ain't sick. I don't know of anythin' that ails him except he's a fool. He won't come—that's the whole of it."

"Won't come!" shrieked the mother. Delia stood stiff and straight.

"No, he won't come. His mother an' I

have been talkin' an' reasonin' with him, but it hasn't done any good. I don't know but it 'll kill his mother. It's all on account of that Briggs girl: you might as well know it. I wish she'd never come near the house. I've seen what way the wind blew for some time, but I never dreamed it would come to this. I think it's a sudden start on his part. I believe he meant to come, this noon, as much as could be; but Olive came home, an' they were talkin' together in the parlour, an' I see she'd been cryin'. His mother an' I got ready, an' when he didn't come downstairs she went up to see where he was. He had his door locked, an' he called out he wasn't goin'; that was all we could get out of him. He wouldn't say another word, but we knew what the trouble was. His mother had noticed how red Olive's eyes were when she went back to the shop. She'd been takin' on, I suppose, an' so he decided, all of a sudden, he'd back out. There ain't any excuse for him, an' I ain't goin' to make up any. He's treated you mean, Delia, an' I'd rather have cut off my right hand than had it happened; that's all I can say about it, an' that don't do any good."

Mrs. Caldwell stepped forward suddenly.

"I should think he had treated her mean!" she said—her voice rose loud and shrill. "I never heard anything like it. If I had a son like that, I wouldn't tell of it. That Briggs girl! He ought to be strung up. If you an' his mother had had any sort of spunk you'd made him come. You always babied him to death. He's a rascal. I'd like to get hold of him, that's all; I——"

Delia caught her mother by the arm. "Mother, if you have any sense, or feeling for me, don't talk so loud: all those folks out there will hear."

The older woman's shrill vituperation flowed through the daughter's remonstrance and beyond it. "I would like to show him he couldn't do such things as this without gettin' some punishment for it. I——"

"Mother!"

Mrs. Caldwell changed her tone suddenly. She began to cry weakly. "O Delia, you poor child, what will you do?" she sobbed.

"It isn't going to do any good to go on so, mother."

"There's all them folks out there. Oh dear! What will they say? I wouldn't care so much if it wa'n't for all them Thayers an' Caldwells. They'll jest crow. Oh dear! you poor child!"

Delia turned to Mr. Thayer. "Somebody ought to tell them," said she, "that—there won't be any—wedding."

"O Delia, how can you take it so calm?" wailed her mother.

"I suppose so," assented the old man; "but I declare I can't tell 'em such a thing about a son of mine. I feel as if I'd been through about all I could."

"The minister would be a good one, wouldn't he?" said Delia.

Mr. Thayer took up with the suggestion eagerly. He opened the door a chink, and asked one of the waiting officious guests to summon the minister. When he came he gave him instructions in an agitated whisper; then retreated. The trio in the bedroom became conscious of a great hush without; then the minister's solemnly inflected voice broke upon it. He was telling them that the wedding was postponed. Then there was a little responsive murmur, and the minister knocked on the door.

"Shall I tell them when it will take place?—they are inquiring," he whispered.

Delia heard him. "You can tell them it will never take place," said she in a clear voice.

The minister stared at her wonderingly.

"Oh!" groaned her mother. Then the minister's voice rose again, and directly there were a creaking and rustling, and subdued clatter of voices. The guests were departing.

After a little, Delia approached the door as if she were going out into the parlour.

"O Delia, don't go! wait till they're all gone!" wailed her mother. "All them Thayers and Caldwells!"

"They are gone, most of them. I've stood in this hot little room long enough," said Delia, and threw open the door. Directly opposite was a mahogany table with the wedding presents on it. Three or four women, among them Mrs. Erastus Thayer and her daughter, were bending over them and whispering.

When the door opened they turned and stared at Delia standing there in her pearl-coloured silk, with some drooping white bridal flowers on her breast. They looked stiff and embarrassed. Then Mrs. Thayer recovered herself and came forward.

"Delia," said she, in a soft whisper, "dear girl."

She put her arm around Delia, and attempted to draw her towards herself; but the girl released herself, and gave her a slight backward push.

"Please don't make any fuss over me, Mrs. Thayer," said she; "it isn't necessary."

Mrs. Thayer started back, and went towards the door. Her face was very red. She tried to smile. Her daughter and the other woman followed her.

"I'm real glad she can show some temper about it," she whispered, when they were all out in the entry. "It's a good deal better for her."

"Ask her why he didn't come," one of the women whispered, nudging her.

"I'm kind of afraid to. I'll stop and ask Hiram on my way home; mebbe Mr. Thayer told him."

Delia, in her bridal gear, stood majestically beside one of the parlour windows. She was plainly waiting for her guests to go. They kept peering in at her, while they whispered among themselves. Presently Mrs. Thayer's daughter came across the room tremblingly. She had hesitated on the parlour threshold, but her mother had given her a slight push on her slender shoulders and she had entered suddenly. She kept looking back as she advanced towards Delia.

"Mother wants to know," she faltered, in her thin girlish pipe, "if—you wouldn't rather—she 'd—take back that toilet set she

brought. She says she don't know but it will make you feel bad to see it."

"Of course you can take it."

"Mrs. Emmons says she'll take her mats too, if you'd like to have her."

"Of course she can take them."

The young girl shrank over to the table, snatched up the toilet set and mats, and fled to her mother.

When they were all gone, David Thayer approached Delia. He had been sitting on a chair by the bedroom door, holding his head in his hands.

"I'm goin' now," said he. "If there's anything I can do, you let me know."

"There won't be anything," said Delia. "I shall get along all right."

He shook her hand hard in his old trembling one. "You're more of a man than Lawrence is," said he. He was a very old man, and his voice, although it was still deep, quavered.

"There isn't any use in your saying much to him," said Delia. "I don't want you to on my account."

"Delia, don't you go to standin' up for him. He don't deserve it."

"I ain't standing up for him. I know he's your son, but it doesn't seem to me

there 's a great deal to stand up for. What he's done is natural enough ; he's been carried away by a pretty face ; but he has shown out what he is."

"I don't blame you a bit for feelin' so, Delia."

"I don't see any other way to feel ; it's the truth."

"Well, good-bye, Delia. I hope you won't lay up anything again' his mother an' me. We'll always think a good deal of you."

"I haven't any reason to lay up anything against you that I know of," said Delia. Her manner was stern, although she did not mean it to be. She could not, as it were, relax her muscles enough to be cordial. All the strength in Delia Caldwell's nature was now concentrated. It could accomplish great things, but it might grind little ones to pieces.

"Well, good-bye, Delia," said the old man piteously. He was himself a strong character, but he seemed weak beside her.

After he had gone, Delia went into the bedroom to her mother. Mrs. Caldwell was sitting there crying. She looked up when her daughter entered.

"O Delia," she sobbed, "what are

you goin' to do?—what are you goin' to do?"

"I am going to take off this dress, for one thing."

"I don't see what you will do. There you've got this dress and your black silk, two new silk dresses, and your new brown woollen one, and your new bonnet and mantle, all these new things, and the weddin'-cake."

"I suppose I can wear dresses and bonnets just as well if I ain't married; and as for the wedding-cake, we'll have some of it for supper."

"Delia Caldwell!"

"What's the matter, mother?"

Delia slipped off the long shimmering skirt of her pearl-coloured silk, shook it out, and laid it carefully over a chair.

"Are you crazy?"

"Not that I know of. Why?"

"You don't act natural."

"I'm acting the way that's natural to me."

"What are you going to do? O you poor child!"

Mrs. Caldwell laid hold of her daughter's hand as she passed near her, and attempted to pull her to her side.

"Don't, please, mother," said Delia.

Her mother relinquished her hold, and

sobbed afresh. "I won't pity you if you don't want me to," said she, "but it's dreadful. There's—another—thing. You've lost your school. Flora Strong's spoke for it, an' she won't want to give it up."

"I don't want her to. I'll get another one."

Delia put on a calico dress, and kindled a fire, and made tea as usual. She put some slices of wedding-cake on the table: perhaps her will extended to her palate, and kept it from tasting like dust and ashes to her. Her mother drank a cup of tea between her lamentations.

After supper Delia packed up her wedding gifts and addressed them to their respective donors. There were a few bits of silver, but the greater number of the presents were pieces of fancy-work from female relatives. She folded these mats and tidies relentlessly with her firm brown fingers. There was no tenderness in her touch. She felt not the least sentiment towards inanimate things.

"I think they're actin' awful mean to want to grab these things back so quick," said her mother, her wrath gaining upon her grief a little.

"It goes well with the rest," said Delia.

Among the gifts which she returned was a little embroidered tidy from Flora Strong, the girl who had been engaged to teach her former school.

Flora came over early the next morning. She opened the door, and stood there hesitating. She was bashful before the trouble in the house. "Good morning, Mrs. Caldwell; good morning, Delia," she faltered deprecatingly. She had a thin, pretty face, with very red lips and cheeks. She fumbled a little parcel nervously.

"Good mornin', Flora," said Mrs. Caldwell. Then she turned her back, and went into the pantry.

Delia was washing dishes at the sink. She spoke just as she always did. "Good morning," said she. "Sit down, won't you, Flora?"

Then Flora began. "O Delia," she burst out, "what made you send this back?—what made you? You didn't think I'd take it?"

"Take what?"

"This tidy. O Delia, I made it for you! It doesn't make any difference whether——" Flora choked with sobs. She dropped into a chair, and put her handkerchief over her face. Mrs. Caldwell heard her, and began

weeping, as she stood in the pantry. Delia went on with her dishes.

"O Delia, you'll—take it back, won't you?" Flora said finally.

"Of course I will, if you want me to. It's real pretty."

"When I heard of it," the girl went on—"I don't know as you want me to speak of it, but I've got to—I felt as if—I declare I'd like to see Lawrence Thayer come up with. I'll never speak to him again as long as I live. Delia, you aren't standing up for him, are you? You don't care if I do say he's—a villain?"

"I hope she don't," wailed her mother in the pantry.

"No," said Delia, "I don't care."

Then Flora offered to give up the school. She pleaded that she should take it, but Delia would not. She could get another, she said.

That afternoon, indeed, she went to see the committee. She had put the house to rights, pinned Flora's tidy on the big rocking-chair in the parlour, and dressed herself carefully in a blue-sprigged muslin, one of her wedding gowns. Passing down the hot village street, she saw women sewing at their cool sitting-room windows. She looked up at them and nodded as usual. She knew

of a school whose teacher had left to be married, as she had done. She thought the vacancy had possibly not been filled. Very little of the vacation had passed. Moreover, the school was not a desirable one: the pay was small, and it was three miles from the village. Delia obtained the position. Early in September she began her duties. She went staunchly back and forth over the rough, dusty road day after day. She had the reputation of being a very fine teacher, although the children were a little in awe of her. They never came to meet her and hang about her on her way to the school-house. Her road lay past the Thayer house, where she would have been living now had all gone well. Occasionally she met Lawrence; she passed him without a look. Quite often she met Olive Briggs, who worked in a milliner's shop, and boarded at Lawrence's father's. She always bowed to her pleasantly. She had seen her in the shop, although she had no real acquaintance with her. The girl was pretty, with the prettiness that Delia lacked. Her face was sweet and rosy and laughing. She was fine and small, and moved with a sort of tremulous lightness like a butterfly. Delia, meeting her, seemed to tramp.

Everybody thought Lawrence and Olive Briggs would be married. They went to evening meetings together, and to ride. Lawrence had a fine horse. Delia was at every evening meeting. She watched her old lover enter with the other girl, and never shrank. She also looked at them riding past.

"Did you see them, Delia?" her mother asked in a fluttering voice one afternoon. She and Delia were sitting at the front windows, and Lawrence and Olive had just whirled by the house.

"Yes."

"You kept so still, I didn't know as you did."

People kept close watch over Lawrence and Olive and Delia. Lawrence was subjected to a mild species of ostracism by a certain set of the village girls, Delia's mates—honest, simple young souls; they would not speak to him on the street. They treated Olive with rough, rural stiffness when they traded with her in the one milliner's shop. She was an out-of-town girl, and had always been regarded with something of suspicion. These village women had a strong local conservatism. They eyed strangers long before they admitted them.

As for Delia, the young women friends of her own age treated her with a sort of deferential sympathy. They dared not openly condole with her, but they made her aware of their partisanship. As a general thing no one except a Thayer or a Caldwell alluded to the matter in her presence. The relatives of the two families were open enough in expressing themselves, either with recrimination or excuse for Lawrence, or with sympathy or covert blame for Delia. She heard the most of it, directly or indirectly. Like many New England towns, this was almost overshadowed by the ramifications of a few family trees. A considerable portion of the population was made of these Thayers and Caddwells—two honourable and respectable old names. They were really, for the most part, kindly and respectable people, conscious of no ill intentions, and probably possessed of few. Some of them expostulated against receiving back those vain bridal gifts, but Delia insisted. Some of them were more willing to give than she to receive their honest and most genuine sympathy, however ungracefully they might proffer it.

Still the fine and exquisite stabs which Delia Caldwell had to take from her own

relations and those of her forsworn bridegroom were innumerable. There are those good and innocent-hearted people who seem to be furnished with stings only for those of their own kind ; they are stingless towards others. In one way this fact may have proved beneficial to Delia : while engaged in active defence against outside attacks, she had no time to sting herself.

She girded on that pearl-coloured silk as if it were chain armour, and went to merry-makings. She made calls in that fine black silk and white-plumed wedding bonnet. It seemed at times as if she were fairly running after her trouble ; she did more than look it in the face.

It was in February, when Delia had been teaching her new school nearly two terms, that Olive Briggs left town. People said she had given up her work and gone home to get ready to be married.

Delia's mother heard of it, and told her. "I should think she'd be awful afraid he wouldn't come to the weddin'," she said bitterly.

"So should I," assented Delia. She echoed everybody's severe remarks about Lawrence.

It might have been a month later when

Flora Strong ran in one morning before school. "I've just heard the greatest news!" she panted. "What do you think—she's jilted him?"

"Jilted whom?"

"Olive Briggs—she's jilted Lawrence Thayer. She's going to be married to another fellow in May. I had it from Milly Davis; she writes to her. It's so."

"I can't believe it," Mrs. Caldwell said, quivering.

"Well, it's so. I declare I jumped right up and down when I heard of it. Delia, aren't you glad?"

"I don't know what difference it can make to me."

"I mean aren't you glad he's got his pay?"

"Yes, I am," said Delia, with slow decision.

"She wouldn't be human if she wasn't," said her mother. Mrs. Caldwell was cold and trembling with nervousness. She stood grasping the back of a chair. "But I'm afraid it ain't so. Are you sure it's so, Flora?"

"Mrs. Caldwell, I know it's so."

Delia on her way to school that morning looked at the Thayer house as she passed.

"I wonder how *he* feels," she said to herself. She saw Lawrence Thayer, in her stead, in the midst of all that covert ridicule and obloquy, that galling sympathy, that agony of jealousy and betrayed trust. They distorted his face like flames; she saw him writhe through their liquid wavering.

She pressed her lips together, and marched along. At that moment, had she met Lawrence, she would have passed him with a fiercer coldness than ever, but if she had seen the girl she would have been ready to fly at her.

The village tongues were even harder on Lawrence than they had been on her. The sight of a person bending towards the earth with the weight of his just deserts upon his shoulders is generally gratifying and amusing even to his friends. Then there was more open rudeness among the young men who were Lawrence's mates. They jeered him everywhere. He went about doggedly. He was strong in silence, but he had a sweet womanish face which showed the marks of words quickly. He was still very young. Delia was two years older than he, and looked ten. Still, Lawrence seemed as old in some respects. He was a quiet, shy young man, who liked to stay at home with

his parents, and never went about much with the young people. Before Olive came he had seldom spoken to any girl besides Delia. They had been together soberly and steadily ever since their school-days.

Some people said now, "Don't you suppose Lawrence Thayer will go with Delia again?" But the answer always was, "She won't look at him."

One Sunday afternoon, about a year after Olive Briggs's marriage, Mrs. Caldwell said to Delia, as they were walking home from church, "I jest want to know if you noticed how Lawrence Thayer stared at you in meet-in' this afternoon?"

"No, I didn't," said Delia. She was looking uncommonly well that day. She wore her black silk, and had some dark-red roses in her bonnet.

"Well, he never took his eyes off you. Delia, that feller would give all his old shoes to come back, if you'd have him."

"Don't talk so foolish, mother."

"He would—you depend on it."

"I'd like to see him," said Delia sternly. There was a red glow on her dull, thick cheeks.

"Well, I say so too," said her mother.

The next night, when Delia reached the

Thayer house on her way from school, Lawrence's mother stood at the gate. She had a little green shawl over her head. She was shivering; the wind blew up cool. Just behind her in the yard there was a little peach-tree all in blossom.

She held out her hand mutely when Delia reached her. The girl did not take it. "Good evening," said she, and was passing.

"Can't you stop jest a minute, Delia?"

"Was there anything you wanted?"

"Can't you come into the house jest a minute? I wanted to see you about somethin'."

"I don't believe I can to-night, Mrs. Thayer."

"There ain't anybody there. There was somethin' I wanted to see you about."

The green shawl was bound severely around her small, old face with its peaked chin. She reached out her long, wrinkled hand over the gate, and clutched Delia's arm softly.

"Well, I'll come in a minute." Delia followed Mrs. Thayer past the blooming peach-tree into the house.

The old woman dragged forward the best rocking-chair tremblingly. "Sit down, dear," said she. Then she seated herself close be-

side her, and, leaning forward, gazed into her face with a sort of deprecating mildness. She even laid hold of one of her hands, but the girl drew it away softly. There was a gentle rustic demonstrativeness about Lawrence's mother which had always rather abashed Delia, who was typically reserved. "I wanted to speak to you about Lawrence," said the old woman. Delia sat stiffly erect, her head turned away. "I can't bear to think you are always goin' to feel so hard towards him, Delia. Did you know it?"

Delia half arose. "There isn't any use in bringing all this up again, Mrs. Thayer; it's all past now."

"Sit down jest a minute, dear. I want to talk to you. I know you've got good reason to blame him; but there's some excuse. He wa'n't nothin' but a boy, an' she was sweet-lookin', an' she took on dreadful. You'd thought she was goin' to die. It's turned out jest the way I knew 'twould. I told Lawrence how 'twould be then. I see right through her. She meant well enough. I s'pose she thought she was in love with Lawrence; but she was flighty. She went home and saw another fellow, an' Lawrence was nowhere. He didn't care so much as folks thought. Delia, I'm goin'

to tell you the truth: he thought more of you than he did of her the whole time. You look as if you thought I was crazy, but I ain't. She jest bewitched him a little spell, but you was at the bottom of his heart always—you *was*, Delia." The old woman broke into sobs.

Delia rose. "I'd better go. There isn't any use in bringing this up, Mrs. Thayer."

"Don't go, Delia—don't. I wanted to tell you. He got to talkin' with me a little the other Sabbath night. It's the first time he's said a word, but he felt awful bad, an' I questioned him. Says he, 'Mother, I don't dream of such a thing as her havin' of me, or carin' anything about me again; but I do feel as if I should like to do somethin' if I could, to make up to her a little for the awful wrong I've done her.' That was jest the words he said. Delia, he ain't such a bad boy as you think he is, after all. You hadn't ought to despise him."

"He'll have to do something to show I've got some reason not to, then," said Delia. She looked immovably at the old woman, who was struggling with her sobs. She told her mother of the conversation after she got home.

"You did jest right," said Mrs. Caldwell.

"I wouldn't knuckle to 'em if I was in your place." She was getting tea. After they had finished the meal, and sat idly at the table for a few minutes, she looked across at her daughter suddenly, with embarrassed sharpness. "Speakin' about Lawrence, you wouldn't feel as if you ever could take him, anyhow, would you?" said she.

"Mother, what are you talking about?"

In a few weeks the anniversary of Delia's defeated wedding came. She spoke of it herself after dinner. She and her mother were making currant-jelly.

"Why, it's my wedding-day, mother," said she. "I ought to have put on my wedding-gown, and eaten some wedding-cake, instead of making jelly."

"Don't talk so, child," said her mother. Sometimes Delia's hardihood startled her.

Delia was pressing the currants in a muslin bag, and the juice was running through her fingers, when there was a loud knock at the door.

"Why, who's that," her mother said, fluttering. She ran and peeped through the sitting-room blinds. "It's Mrs. 'Rastus Thayer," she motioned back, "an' Milly."

"I'll go to the door," said Delia. She washed her hands hurriedly, and went.

She noticed with surprise that the two visitors were dressed in their Sunday best, Mrs. Thayer in her nicely kept cinnamon-brown silk, and Milly in her freshly starched white muslin. They had an air of constrained curiosity about them as they entered and took their seats in the parlour.

Delia sat down with them and tried to talk. Pretty soon her mother, who had prinked a little, entered; but just as she did so there was another knock. Some of the Caldwell cousins had come this time. They also were finely dressed, and entered with that same soberly expectant air. They were hardly seated before others arrived. Delia, going to the door this time, saw the people coming by twos and threes up the street. They flocked in, and she brought chairs. Nothing disturbed her outward composure; but her mother grew pale and tremulous. She no longer tried to speak; she sat staring. At two o'clock the rooms were filled with that same company who had assembled to see Delia wedded two years before.

They sat around the walls in stiff silence; they seemed to be waiting. Delia was not imaginative, nor given to morbid fancies; but sitting there in the midst of that mysterious company, in her cotton gown,

with her hands stained with currant juice, she began to fairly believe that it was a dream. Were not these people mere phantoms of the familiar village folk assembling after this truly fantastic manner, and sitting here in this ghostly silence? Was not the whole a phantasmagoria of the last moments of her sweet old happiness and belief in truth? Was not she herself, disenchanted, with her cotton gown and stained hands, the one real thing in it?

The scent of the pinks came in the window, and she noticed that. "How real it all is!" she thought. "But I shall wake up before long." It was like one of those dreams in which one clings staunchly to the consciousness of the dream, and will not sink beneath its terrors.

When Lawrence Thayer entered she seemed to wake violently. She half rose from her seat, then sank down again. Her mother screamed.

Lawrence Thayer stood by the parlour door, where everybody in the two rooms could hear him. His gentle, beardless face was pale as death, but the pallor revealed some strong lines which his youthful bloom had softened. He was slender, and stooped a little naturally; now he was straight as a

reed. He had a strange look to these people who had always known him.

"Friends," he began, in a solemn, panting voice, "I—have—asked you to come here on the anniversary of the day on which Delia Caldwell and I were to have been married, to make to her, before you all, the restitution in my power. I don't do it to put myself before you in a better light: God, who knows everything, knows I don't: it's for *her*. I was a coward, and mean, and it's going to last. Nothing that I can do now is going to alter that. All I want now is to make up to her a little for what she's been through. Two years ago to-day she stood before you all rejected and slighted. Now look at me in her place."

Then he turned to Delia, with a stiff motion. It was like solemn, formal oratory, but his terrible earnestness gave it heat. "Delia Caldwell, I humbly beg your pardon. I love you better than the whole world, and I ask you to be my wife."

"I never will." It was as if Delia's whole nature had been set to these words; they had to be spoken. She had risen, and stood staring at him so intently that the whole concourse of people vanished in blackness. She saw only his white face. All the

thoughts in her brain spread wings and flew, swiftly circling. She heard what he said, and she heard her own thoughts with a strange double consciousness. All those days came back—the sweet old confidences, the old looks and ways. That pale speaking face was Lawrence's—Lawrence's ; not that strange other's who had left her for that pink-faced girl. This revelation of his inner self, which smote the others with a sense of strangeness, thrilled her with the recognition of love. "A coward and mean." Yes, he had been, but——. Yes, there was some excuse for him—there was. Is not every fault wedded to its own excuse, that pity may be born into the world? He was as honest in what he was saying as a man could be. He could have had no hope that she would marry him. He knew her enduring will, her power of indignation. This was no subtle scheme for his own advantage. Even these people would not think that. They would not, indeed, believe him capable of it. The system of terrible but coolly calculated ventures for success was one with which this man would not be likely to grapple. He was honest in this. There sat all the Thayers and Caldwells. How they would talk and laugh at him !

Lawrence turned to go. He had bowed silently when she gave him her quick answer. There was a certain dignity about him. He had in reality pulled himself up to the level of his own noble avowed sentiments.

Delia stood gazing after him. She looked so relentless that she was almost terrible. One young girl, staring at her, began to cry.

Mrs. Erastus Thayer sat near the door. Delia's eyes glanced from Lawrence to her face. Then she sprang forward.

"You needn't look at him in that way," she cried out. "I am going to marry him Lawrence, come back."

THE END.



